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**Darrell Schweitzer  
Robert Adams**



**J. O. Jeppson  
J. A. Lawrence**

edited by George Scithers,  
four-time Hugo award winner



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AMAZING/FANTASTIC

JULY 1984

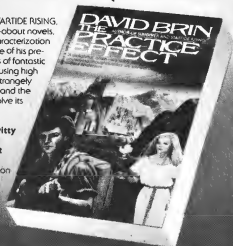
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# AMAZING™

JULY 1984

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# OPINION

by Robert Silverberg

One Sunday night last autumn virtually everyone in the United States gathered in front of television sets to watch a science-fiction film. According to the ratings services, 54.2% of the households that have television sets were watching the show; of all those who were watching television at all at that hour, 69% were tuned to that particular show. It was the third most popular event in television history, trailing only the 1976 network showing of *Gone With the Wind* and the March, 1983, final episode of "M\*A\*S\*H."

And what was this enormously popular science-fiction show? A special preview of Luke Skywalker's honeymoon? *E.T. meets King Kong*? *Indiana Jones at the Mountains of Madness*? Ah, no, it was none of those jolly films-to-come that caught the whole nation's attention. It was nothing jolly at all; it was a real bummer of a story, in fact, a tale of nuclear holocaust in Kansas, a bleak little item called *The Day After*. Of course.

Science fiction? Sure it was. You mean you didn't notice that? It fits any SF definition I could provide. It takes place in the future, just for starters — we haven't yet had any thermonuclear detonations in Kansas, have we? It depicts the stark consequences of technological development — a classic SF theme. It uses special effects to portray the physiological effects of

nuclear radiation on human beings. Why, it was just last year that a story much like *The Day After* was awarded a Nebula by the Science Fiction Writers of America, and in the quaint old days of 1946 the magazine that was then known as *Astounding Science Fiction*, the clear leader in the field at that time, devoted what seemed like a third of its pages to stories of nuclear apocalypse. The fact that *The Day After* appears to take place about five months in our future does not disqualify it as science fiction. A movie about the first voyage to the moon would have a tough time calling itself SF, in these post-Apollo days; but not a movie about the first H-bombing of the United States; no, not yet, not yet.

Still, nobody spoke of *The Day After* as science fiction, although technically speaking it falls in that category. Everyone talked of it as a political film, a warning for our times, a desperate outcry for sanity before it is too late, and so on and so on — a Very Serious Event, that is. Science-fiction movies are never considered Very Serious Events; when science fiction is taken seriously (i.e., Orwell's 1984) it is generally no longer thought of as science fiction.

But, surprising as it may seem to you to consider *The Day After* to be science fiction, I will now offer you an even more startling hypothesis: that *The Day After* served to satisfy the

public's appetite, not for the speculative mindplay of science fiction or for the serious uplift of political discourse, but for flesh-crawlers, for tales of horror and disaster. The movie belongs over there in the corner with Poe, with Lovecraft, with Stephen King, with *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, with *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The real reason that 100 million Americans sat down to watch that movie, I think, was to be comfortably scared to death in the warmth of their own living rooms — while telling themselves that they were taking part in some important national outcry to be remembered for all time. Doubtless some people had the loftiest possible motives for seeing the movie, though they seem like fairly foolish motives to me; but I suspect that there aren't 100 million television viewers in the nation capable of sustaining such lofty motives long enough to make the effort of tuning in Channel 7.

Mind you, I'm not offering an argument for the benefits of nuclear holocaust. I think even a casual and minor exchange of H-bombs by any two nations on earth would be a ghastly catastrophe. I wish the damned things would melt in the night like snow in Los Angeles, and never be reinvented. But it happens that I don't anticipate any such melting, and that I have very grave doubts about the practicality and efficacy (not the desirability!) of the various programs for nuclear disarmament that have been proposed. Still, it is not my intention to argue the pros and cons of the nuclear freeze movement here, only to examine what was really going on in *The Day After*.

It was, I thought, a feeble movie. There was little in the way of character development, not much plot, and

(considering the previous weeks of publicity) certainly no suspense. There was some attempt at science-fictional projection of what it would be like to live in an urban center after the bomb falls, but nothing very original or interesting was shown. The only value I could see in it was a fairly sick value indeed: since what is depicted was a straight toboggan-slide into hopeless ruin, it allowed the viewer to say to himself, as he sat quietly sipping his Budweiser, *I am horrified, I am appalled, I am stunned. I am very glad that this is happening to these imaginary people on the screen, instead of to me. If I had the necessary degree of follow-through, I would certainly write a letter to my Senator or to the President, asking him not to let such a horrifying and appalling thing happen to my state, or at least not in this county.* The show — belaboring the obvious, telling us that Dropping H-Bombs is Real Bad For Everybody — left people with that warm good feeling of despair that comes from a truly overwhelming imaginary calamity. That is, it did what horror stories do.

I don't mean to be flippant. I don't like living under the sword of nuclear destruction any more than you do; and I've lived under it now for almost forty years, like everyone else who was alive on the day of Hiroshima. But it saddens me that Americans are deemed so stupid that they are thought to need films like this to remind them that atomic warfare is unpleasant; and it angers me and arouses the deepest sort of cynicism in me, to see a whole nation gathering around a mediocre horror show like *The Day After* with the belief that it has taken part in some communal rite that will help drive the demons away. I'd rather hear people saying — but no one did — that they watched the movie simply for the

agreeably creepy sensations of participating in a wholly imaginary catastrophe, and they enjoyed every miserably scary moment of it.

It was, by the way, a lousy horror film, with very tame special effects. The flattening of Kansas City seemed not much worse than what Dorothy's tornado multiplied by three would have done, and the radiation after-effects amounted mainly to freckling and slow dropping of hair. I remember the newsreels of Hiroshima and its aftermath, though I would be glad to forget those images, if I could. They

were truly horrifying, and I will spare you the detailed descriptions. That was one dinky 25-kiloton bomb, at Hiroshima. Kansas, in *The Day After*, got enough H-bombs to light up the sky from Chicago to San Francisco for a week. If ABC had shown us what Kansas and its citizens *really* would look like after such a bombardment, the network wouldn't have been able to sell a single commercial for the show. Scaring people is one thing, and a profitable one; scaring them away is something else altogether.

✂



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# BOOK REVIEWS

by Robert Coulson

I'm writing this column during the Christmas holidays, which would give me an ideal opportunity to look at *The Year In Science Fiction* if it wasn't so much more fun to listen to my Christmas presents and catch up on reading back issues of *American Heritage* and Miss Manners' guide to etiquette. (For those who know me, I'm not planning to start following her advice, but her comments are amusing and I like her way with language.) Instead, I'll just briefly note that the absence of all those Grand Old Names who appeared in 1982 doesn't seem to have hurt the overall quality of the fiction in 1983; I still received more good books than I had time to read. A select stack of the most intriguing is set aside for perusal when I have time; probably on long winter evenings in 1992. The last couple of months have seen publication of several excellent historical fantasies; these I have read, and their reviews begin immediately.

## **The Anubis Gates**

by Tim Powers

Ace, \$3.95 (paperback)

This is the best of the lot, and is totally different in style and setting from Powers's previous excellent novel, *The Drawing of the Dark*. This time the setting is London in 1810, with brief glimpses of other years; and the protagonist is a somewhat wimpish academic type, intelligent enough but

with no idea of how to survive in a moderately alien environment. I did love the logical idea that the best means of survival for a stranded time-traveler in that era (or in most others, I suspect) is that of professional beggar. Our hero, of course, has to run afoul of the shop stewards of the beggars' union; he's that type. It's an intricate plot, with an Egyptian sorcerer and a modern millionaire both attempting to manipulate events to their own advantage; and a major character is a mass murderer who can switch bodies with anyone he meets, and does, to avoid identification and capture. There are interesting ideas on sorcery, the historical background is excellent, the hero gets by on dumb luck but it's convincing while you're reading, and the plotting is outstanding. It just might be the best book of the year.

## **The Dragon Waiting**

by John Ford

Timescape, \$15.95 (hardcover)

The setting here is an alternate world, in the years just before Richard III takes the English throne. Byzantium has survived as a world power and has divided France with England, leaving a small buffer state presided over by Louis XI. Vampires exist and, being recognized as having a rather unpleasant disease of the blood, are shunned. One of the band of heroes is a vampire; he's also a German artillery



officer. The others are a woman physician of Venice, a pretender to the Byzantine throne, and a descendant of Owen Glendower. They have no common goals, but band together to bring Richard to the throne, as the best alternative to Byzantine world domination. The alternate history is well worked out; the only flaw would be that Ford demands a lot from his readers. The better you know the real history of the period, the better you'll understand the book; some points are never explained. I'm no expert on that period of English history, but I enjoyed the book anyway, even if I missed some of the finer points. Recommended to anyone who enjoys alternate-world stories.

### **Lammas Night**

by Katherine Kurtz  
Ballantine, \$3.50 (paperback)

This is the most recent setting of the group; background is World War II, just after Dunkirk, and it's very close to being a historical novel. It's known that Hitler believed in astrology and magic, and it can be assumed that those English witches who existed at the time did magical incantations to protect the country. So the only fantasy in the book is the assumption that all this nonsense worked, and I can envision readers who will believe that, too. I fully expect occultists to be quoting this one as straight history in a few years, if not immediately. The book traces the efforts of one of the groups, and along the way I got more information than I really wanted on reincarnation, Tarot reading, the theory of the divine king, and other occult practices. If you like this sort of thing, you'll love the book; if you don't, it's slightly tedious, though Kurtz makes it more interesting than I would have thought she could. My only quibble is

that the current ruling house of Windsor (originally Saxe-Coburg-Gotha) has a very tenuous connection with the early British kings; more tenuous than Kurtz implies. For that matter, William Rufus's link with "the old blood" wasn't all that great. Generally a well-done book, and more entertaining than I expected.

### **World's End**

by Joan D. Vinge  
Bluejay, \$13.95 (hardcover)

There is also a \$40 collector's edition, for anyone interested. This is a sort of sequel to *The Snow Queen*, in that the protagonist is Sergeant (now Inspector) Gundhalinu of the previous book, and Moon appears as an offstage character. But it's a completely different story, set on a different planet. The Hegemony is, like Moon, offstage. In essence, Gundhalinu descends into Hell to retrieve the family honor (and his own), and comes out with it. I don't know my classics well enough to recognize the inspiration, but I suspect one is there. *World's End* is a horror, where even the landscape changes; I was reminded of an old Henry Kuttner story, "Lands of the Earthquake." Vinge's treatment is mostly psychological, as Gundhalinu gradually loses self-respect and what earlier authors would have termed "manhood," and eventually is partly restored and partly transformed. Well done, as Vinge's usually are.

### **The War For Eternity**

by Christopher Rowley  
Del Rey, \$2.95 (paperback)

This one arrived just too late for my last column; now it will probably be off most newsstands before this column appears. Well, it's worth a small effort to find. The blurb compares it to the work of Alan Dean



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Foster and Poul Anderson; I should think that H. Beam Piper would be a closer match. Human colonists and furry (but not Fuzzy) aliens battle the World Government of Earth for independence (and for control of a longevity drug). It's straight space-adventure, and except for a somewhat *deus ex sylvania* ending, it's very well done. (Even the gods have been mentioned previously; I don't consider the mention adequate, but there is a thin strip of brilliance between not planting adequate information and telegraphing your ending, and Rowley at least comes close.) If you can't find a copy now, try to get it by mail.

### **The John W. Campbell Awards, Vol. 5**

Ed. by George R. R. Martin  
Bluejay, \$7.95 (trade paperback)

This is an anthology of original stories, written by the nominees for the award. The first four volumes were titled *New Voices*, and were from a different publisher. Due to various publishing problems including the change of publishers, these are the nominees for the 1977 award, some of whom have fulfilled their promise to become big names in the intervening years; the award is for new writers only. There is a preface, explaining all this, by the editor, an introduction by Poul Anderson, and a list of nominees and winners through 1982.

Stories are "In The Dowaii Chambers" by Jack Chalker, "Dreams" by M. A. Foster, "A Catastrophe Machine" by Carter Scholz, and two stories by award-winner C. J. Cherryh, "The Dark King" and "Companions."

Chalker's novelet concerns an alien construction discovered in the Navajo country, and of the effect it has on four scientists who investigate it and find that it's still operating. I liked it much

better than I have most of Chalker's novels.

Foster's story is basically on the need for humans to dream of a better life, and, on another level, of the beauties of adultery in a rigid society. It tended to annoy me, as most stories of hopeless longing do; the characters have neither the drive to better themselves nor the ability to make do with what they have; they're whiners.

Scholz's protagonist is obsessed with loss. Very poetic, very unhappy, very unsympathetic. The character has no redeeming features whatever, and neither did the story.

Cherryh's "The Dark King" is a retelling of the Sisyphus myth, with a happy ending; interesting but slight. The novelet "Companions" is considerably more complicated, though the plot is simple enough; the lone survivor of an exploration team on an alien planet programs the ship's computer to act as a companion, and then doesn't like the results. The theme covers loneliness, the need for dreams, the problem of reality when there can be no separate confirmation, and jealousy.

Since both novelets are good, the book is a moderate success; the two poorest stories don't take up that many pages or that much reading time.

### **A New Settlement of Old Scores**

by John Brunner  
NESFA Press, Box G, MIT Branch  
P.O., Cambridge MA 02139-0910,  
\$8.00 (paperback)

This was compiled for the 41st World Science Fiction Convention, at which Brunner was Guest of Honor, and comes in either book-type or plastic binding; the latter is best for anyone who actually wants to sing the material. There are words and music for thirty-two songs, divided about

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equally into science-fiction material and protest songs. The latter are quite often too radical for me, but they tend to be better as songs than are the space-faring ones, probably because Brunner takes them more seriously. Content of the protests is quite similar to material by Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger, if you're acquainted with their records; I buy them regularly.

### **Something Answered**

by Gene DeWeese

Dell/Emerald, \$3.25 (paperback)

This is being marketed as a modern horror novel, but Gene's "alien presence" is alien in the science-fictional sense. There's not much explanation of what it is, but it's definitely alien instead of Satanic. Plot is the fairly standard one of inexplicable (to everyone but the reader) events in a small town. I thought it was better done than most, but I'm not really a connoisseur of the genre. At any rate, I enjoyed it.

### **1984: Spring**

by Arthur C. Clarke

Del Rey, \$14.95 (hardcover)

Subtitled "A Choice of Futures," this is a collection of Clark's speeches and articles from the past few years. They're primarily liberal and optimistic, a rare combination these days, but Clarke backs up his views with scientific theories and parallels with recent advances. There's a lot of duplication — these were originally similar themes presented to different audiences — but enough original thought to make the book worth reading.

One final note: Berkley has reprinted Harlan Ellison's anthologies, *Dangerous Visions* and *Again, Dangerous Visions*, as trade paperbacks at prices approximating those of the original hardcovers. (Of course, prices in general have gone up since original publication.) They're not as indispensable as the publisher claims, but they're good collections if you haven't already read them.

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## **by Frank Catalano**

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All fiction has one thing in common; its writers create worlds. Now the creation of a world can be as simple as using our contemporary everyday world and sticking in a few fictitious people and locales, but you can argue that that world is a new one that's been created just for that piece of fiction.

All science fiction and fantasy takes that at least one step further; while a writer of SF or fantasy can use a contemporary setting and a fictitious character here or there, that kind of world is likely surpassed in number by

writers who create *entire* worlds.

Not all those worlds are necessarily convincing. Taking an example from television, one episode of the series "Star Trek" has a planet with a pink sky. No sign of pink oceans, from what I could tell. Or for that matter, no good reasons why the sky should be pink; it just was. At least it looked pretty — but for all the creativity that went into that world-building, odds are you'd be better off on Earth.

So let's add another class of world-builder to our discussions: the kind who not just adds alien elements to a

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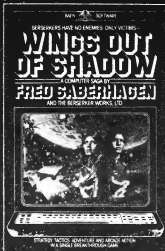


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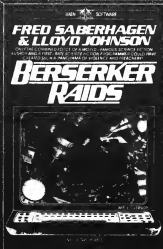
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familiar Earth, but thinks it all out, from how the eco-system would behave to gravitational pull to the world's place in the universe. That's a hard trick to pull off convincingly, and not always everything a writer has to think up to create such a world is going to show up in the novel — after a while, you might as well just write a travelogue ("Over here is the slightly explosive sea, and just a little to its left are the flaming ducks . . .").

But the combination of a very well-built world with a very entertaining and smoothly-paced plot, that's the ultimate. Books like Larry Niven's *Ringworld*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and several others come to mind. Like any ultimate, it's something most can only hope to approach.

### **Helliconia Summer**

by Brian W. Aldiss

Atheneum, \$16.95 (cloth)

Brian W. Aldiss does his best to reach that ultimate with *Helliconia Summer*, book two in the trilogy that began with *Helliconia Spring* and will end with the publication of *Arctic Helliconia*. Back in the January 1983 issue of *Amazing* I summed up my thoughts about *Helliconia Spring* with, "If you like a well-crafted world with an unusual environment, I can recommend it; but it's not an easy read." The former still holds true, but I'm not so sure about the latter when it comes to *Helliconia Summer*.

To the premise: *Helliconia* revolves around a sun that's part of a binary star system. *Helliconia's* sun is in a long, elliptical orbit around the other sun; and for most of that orbit, which takes about 2,500 Earth years, *Helliconia* is far from the central star. That keeps *Helliconia* in deep freeze for centuries, but when the orbiting star approaches and makes a tight turn

around the central star, a relatively short period of warmth ensues.

Unlike *Helliconia Spring*, which looks at several generations as they begin the slow recovery from winter to new life, *Helliconia Summer* focuses on about six months as the full force of the summer nears. And that focus gets even narrower, as Aldiss chronicles what happens to the king of one *Helliconian* nation who has to decide what is best for him and his country, among choices of keeping his queen or marrying the daughter of a nearby king for stability, harboring intelligent phagors or destroying them because others say they are Mankind's ancient enemy, and listening to a man who says he's from an Earth observation satellite around *Helliconia* and can help, or ignoring him as *Helliconia's* religion demands.

And if that sounds complicated, there's more — a lot more. Aldiss writes a convincing, rich, and complex tale that weaves together strands of *Helliconian* politics, *Helliconian* environment, and the limited intervention of a distant Earth, watching and trying to learn.

So to the readability. I found this second volume a lot easier to read than the initial novel, and I'm not sure why. It's not any shorter. *Helliconia Spring* is 361 pages and its sequel is 398. And we're not talking standard-sized hard-cover novel pages, either; these are slightly oversized.

That leaves several things, the most prominent of which is familiarity. In *Helliconia Spring*, Aldiss drags the narrative to a dead halt a number of times by reciting facts and figures about *Helliconia* (the Travelogue Syndrome) which are neat, but don't keep the pace going. The facts and figures are still there in *Helliconia Summer*, but aren't as obtrusive, most



likely because the groundwork has been laid in the first book. Then there's the sharper plot focus, and maybe, above all, a fascination. It's obvious Aldiss has done a lot of work in developing Helliconia, and it's a pleasure to watch him spring little pieces of information throughout the plot that tie together neatly.

I'm loath to make predictions in print where they're likely to come back and haunt me, but here's one: that the *HELLICONIA TRILOGY* will be a science-fiction classic, and when people ask if there's literature in SF, those asked will point to it.

### **Worlds Apart**

by Joe Haldeman

Viking, \$14.95 (cloth)

Another trilogy, another world. This time it's the *WORLDS TRILOGY* and the world is Earth, along with the various man-made inhabited satellites orbiting the planet.

Marianne O'Hara lives on the satellite New New York, and is one of the few who has lived on Earth itself, escaping just before Earth blew civilization into oblivion in a nuclear war. How O'Hara got herself into that mess in her first visit to Earth is the subject of the first book in the trilogy; this time around, Haldeman concentrates on the rebuilding of the satellite worlds and of the Earth after the war. It also follows O'Hara in her role as reluctant member of two missions to Earth, while her Earthside lover who survived the war tries to stay alive himself and get in touch with O'Hara.

The story line in *Worlds Apart* doesn't seem as solid as the one in *Worlds*, but that could be because it's the middle book of a trilogy. The story goes from one episode to another, in large part, and covers quite a few years. Despite the fragmentation, the

pace is fast and the characters interesting. And things do tie together, in at least a symbolic sense, by the end of the novel.

*Worlds Apart* is a good read, with all that implies about the pace, characters, and the scientific extrapolation. Likely it will be better read in retrospect, when the third volume in its trilogy comes out.

### **Across the Sea of Suns**

by Gregory Benford

Timescape, \$15.95 (cloth)

Greg Benford has established himself as a master of hard science fiction with his earlier novels, most notably *Timescape* and *Against Infinity*. *Across the Sea of Suns* is billed as the sequel to *In the Ocean of Night*, and it's promised there will be a third volume in the series (that's right — another trilogy).

*In the Ocean of Night* was published in 1977 — I honestly can't recall if I ever read my copy (with a cover price of \$8.95 hardcover; sigh), so I have to review its sequel from the point of view of someone who's picking it up solo. That's not a bad point of view either, since the new novel doesn't give any indication it is a sequel. It doesn't read like one, either.

Fifty years have passed since astronaut Nigel Walmsley discovered an ancient alien spacecraft on an asteroid, and it's been 30 years since a radio broadcast from space in English was picked up. Walmsley now is on board the spacecraft *Lancer*, heading to the source of those signals. When he and the crew get there, they find something in orbit they dub the Watcher, apparently a kind of machine intelligence that can kill a planet. At the same time, Earth's oceans are being invaded by an alien life-form that makes travelling the seas deadly. And

**His vengeance would rock the Ecliptic.  
His name would reign terror from  
Callisto to Jupiter.  
But even a tyrant might once be a hero.**

## **BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT. VOLUME II: MERCENARY.**

The renegade's revenge continues... Exiled from home, a conscript in Jupiter's corrupt Navy, Hope Hubris rises to command a deadly squadron. His mission? To purge the Ecliptic of the bloody pirates of Jupiter.

Mercenary. Volume II in Piers Anthony's titanic saga, Bio of a Space Tyrant. Peerless science fiction from a master storyteller.



**BY PIERS ANTHONY**  
**AVON Paperback. \$2.95**

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there might be a link between the two.

The science is well thought out, from the science behind the stardrive to the biology of the aliens. The characters are good. The plot is smoothly-paced and the background interesting. The only major reservation I have with the book is the ending, which doesn't seem to resolve much or leave the reader with an upbeat feeling. Not that every book has to have an upbeat ending; I just get the impression of futility.

Maybe the next book will change all that. But by all other indications, this book is meant to stand on its own, and it does, foggy ending or not.

### **The Sword of Winter**

by Marta Randall

Timescape, \$14.95 (cloth)

There are several things that make this book different from the three mentioned before, most pleasantly (at least for a reviewer) that it's not part of a trilogy. *The Sword of Winter* also is not science fiction, but rather a fantasy, and a very good one.

Cherek is a land with an emerging industrial technology, but with the nasty politics that a feudal system seems to thrive on. The main character is Lyeth, a Rider who serves the dying Lord Gambin of Jentesi Province. Gambin may be on his way out, but he still tries to keep a stranglehold on the local populace while his relatives scheme to succeed him. Lyeth wants none of it, but is drawn into the manipulations through attacks against her Riders' Guild, and possibly against herself.

Randall manages to paint a vivid picture of her world without stooping to the verbal excesses that mar a lot of fantasy these days. The histories of Jentesi and Lyeth are brought out smoothly through the plot, and the

players are well drawn.

Overall, it's a satisfying book. If you like historical-style fantasy with no Tolkien-esque trappings, odds are you'll be more than pleased with *The Sword of Winter*.

### **Unicorn Variations**

by Roger Zelazny

Timescape, \$14.95 (cloth)

Roger Zelazny is a writer with a wide range: from the humor of *Doorways in the Sand* to the literary aspirations of *Creatures of Light and Darkness*. I'm not about to argue with anyone about which side of Zelazny is better, but both sides get a good representation in Zelazny's latest collection, *Unicorn Variations*.

There are 20 short stories and a couple of essays in *Unicorn Variations*, many of them familiar, most of them good. Trotting out my handy Satisfaction Index, the number of memorable pages divided by the total number of pages expressed as a percentage, *Unicorn Variations* gets a very satisfying 86.

One good reason for the high rating is that the few stories I didn't like (or, in at least one case I'm not ashamed to mention, didn't understand), were very short. Zelazny has several very short stories in *Unicorn Variations*, ranging from the literary to the awful joke, or both (read "But Not the Herald" for that one). It also has the excellent "Home is the Hangman" and the title story. Sources of the stories are far-ranging as well, from fanzines to prozines, and the years cover a wide range, from 1965 to 1982.

If that weren't enough, Zelazny offers an introduction and opening comments to about every piece that help put them into perspective. A worthwhile sampling of a versatile writer.

### **The High Kings**

by Joy Chant

Bantam, \$24.95 (cloth)

*The High Kings* is a marvelous collection of ancient Celtic tales and legends, compiled and retold by fantasy author Joy Chant. Each story is introduced with a short lecture about a specific element of Celtic history or culture. For example, the influence of superstitions and personal taboos on the Celtic warrior introduces the story "Great Bran," which speaks of the tragic tale of Bran the Blessed and his sister Branwen. The code of honor of a Celtic warrior is reflected in the legend of "The Sons of Troy," the classic tale of the meeting of King Cassivelaunos and Julius Caesar. Not only does each tale reflect an element of Celtic culture, but each gives deeper insights into the Celtic people as a race: the proud women warriors of "The Two Queens of Locrin," the power of a bard's praise in "Leir and His Daughters," the influential druids in "The Mighty Brothers." Therefore, each story captures the essence of the Celts in vivid detail.

Since the Celtic race lacked a written tradition, tales were originally passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. To maintain this air of authenticity, Joy Chant surrounds each story with a natural framework: tales are told by Celtic bards around a campfire, or at the courts of the High Kings.

Accompanying the fine cultural notes and magnificent legends are the finely crafted paintings of artist George Sharp. "His paintings are always meticulously authentic . . ."

says the brief biography of Sharp, who rendered some forty illustrations for *The High Kings*. Sharp, an Englishman, has had his share of typical commercial and scholastic art experience before working on this book, his first full-length commission. His skills seem to have been toned well by it. He masters anatomy, color, shadow, and pattern to create realistic, though sometimes dreamy, images of an age long past.

Those familiar with the Celtic culture will be struck by the authentic depiction of the armor, weapons, and garb. Sharp has taken advantage of the wealth of artifacts found in his country's museums to enrich his works with historical realism.

The authenticity is nice to see, but it should be standard for artists illustrating historically based stories. Sharp, however, has taken his works beyond that. As good illustrations should, they expand and visualize the words, giving a deeper and clearer image of characters and situations. In one piece, a tear is shown dripping down a woman's proud, stern face as she dons her helm in order to meet her husband in mortal combat to defend her honor against his infidelity. Not only is her apparel realistic, but also a feeling for the sadness her task causes is sensed.

In addition, the women portrayed in *The High Kings* are depicted as the equals of men. The artists chose to render them this way as opposed to the submissive wenches or platemailed beach-blondes so typical of fantasy art.

The artwork does a fine job of bringing the Celtic way of life across visually, sometimes with startling contrast

to our own; for example, typical scenes include a mother handing her toddler the severed head of a traitor as if it were a stuffed toy and a naked warrior standing on the shore to meet an invading Saxon fleet. The tales make a different time and way come to life, and the illustrations animate it. Usually, there is a well-defined line between illustrative and fine art; this is not the case with Sharp's art in this

book.

With its authentic tales and legends, informative cultural notes, and beautiful artwork, *The High Kings* is a rare panorama of Celtic life. It is highly recommended, especially for those readers who have a fascination for ancient Celtic culture. Both Chant and Sharp should be applauded for their efforts, as should Bantam Books for publishing such a superb gift book. ✕

## CARTOON

GOSHI GOSHI  
GOSHI  
GOSHI GOSHI  
GOSHI GOSHI  
GOSHI GOSHI

HOW DO YOU KEEP  
ALL THOSE  
ARROWS  
GOING!



William Rotsler

## CARTOON



Alexis Gilliland

# DISCUSSIONS

by The Readers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I have just discovered your magazine, and am now reading the fourth issue of it since I started buying it at the newsstand in the local base exchange here in Lajes Field, Azores, Portugal. While I like the stories very much (some more than others, of course), I disagree with enough of your other comments and some items of your format to take the time to write this letter.

First, I have not just started reading science fiction. I first discovered science-fiction magazines when I bought an *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine at a newsstand in Seattle while on vacation in July, 1959. After two or three months, I started subscribing, and have subscribed to that publication ever since.

I don't remember where I saw my first *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, but within a couple of months I subscribed, and I scraped together some very hard-earned college-student dollars to buy a lifetime subscription to that publication. It remains my favorite science-fiction magazine, even though I am very attracted to your magazine.

Through the years I have also seen copies (new on newsstand, used at the University of Chicago book exchange) of *If* and *Galaxy*, but I have never before, until last spring, seen a copy of *Amazing Stories* or *Fantastic Stories*

for sale anywhere. I had heard of *Amazing Stories* from various book review columns and editorial comments, but assumed it had either disappeared as the golden age of pulp magazines faded away, or had been absorbed by someone else, probably *Astounding* or *Analog*.

My point — your sales won't increase unless new people can discover your magazine, but apparently you are doing something right, because it appeared on our exchange newsstand for the first time. I think your goal of increasing your sales by a factor of 20 is unrealistic and not likely to happen. I also think that your idea of increasing subscription sales without increasing newsstand sales is wrong, and won't or can't happen.

I have attempted to sell magazines as a fund-raising project through one of the school subscription services and I can tell you that people won't — just absolutely won't — subscribe to a magazine they haven't seen. That means they must either see it in a library (where digest-size science-fiction magazines are rarely seen) or they must buy it on a newsstand prior to subscribing.

It seems to me that the way to make your magazine have larger sales is to increase its exposure on newsstands and other retail markets for magazines. You are making a serious mistake, I think, not to use your newsstand

copies as a platform to make the pitch for subscription sales. Every magazine I subscribe to (currently 10 different publications), I bought after seeing a copy. Even in your letters to the editor which you have published, a reader states that he bought some copies of your magazine and decided to subscribe. I think that's the normal way.

An alternative suggestion for you — include a free coupon with every TSR, Inc., game that is sold for a copy of your magazine. Then redeem the coupons with recent back issues returned unsold, which with your type of magazine amounts to half the press run, I suspect. Send these bulk rate like junk mail, not the more expensive second-class rate of a paying subscriber, maybe three or four mailings a year. In these magazines, include a pitch for subscriptions.

Finally, the part of this letter that is more important to me, if not to you. The interior format of the magazine originally put me off, and since you ask about it, I'll comment.

First, those ragged columns in the last two magazines really slow me down. I finally gave up reading the Nov. 1983 "Opinion" because I was so put off by the format. Please, please use right-justified columns. When I get a computer, the first thing I want is a word-processor program that produces proportional spacing like this ancient typewriter, but also right-justified margins which I think are a pleasure to look at, make reading faster and easier, and give a neater, more professional appearance.

With this typewriter, justifying the right margins is a lot of work — but if your equipment is computerized, it should be easy for you to do.

Finally, please put all your stories in two-column right-justified form. I like to read much faster than the left-to-

right eye movement of a wide one-column page allows, and I think your stories would be much more readable and accessible if you would make that change. *Fantasy and Science Fiction* uses the wide one-column page only for its science fact article, which is intended to be read more slowly — I think that's a good idea. I find your type-face very attractive, and I hope you keep it, however. It's one of the most readable type-faces I've seen anywhere.

Thank you for reading all of this. I hope your sales effort succeeds, and you reach your sales goals. Good luck.

Sincerely,  
Keith Ballantine  
APO New York NY

*Since our present (well, as of December 1983, when this is being typed) subscription circulation is around 2,000; and that of Analog and Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine is around 90,000 to 100,000 each, obviously ours is not what it could be. I'd rather increase our subscription list by 50 times; I'll settle for 20 times as an interim measure.*

*Your comments on soliciting subscriptions are based on your own experience selling subscriptions, so we're especially interested in what you've said here. We are uneasy about simply converting newsstand sales into subscriptions, because the newsstand base — around 10,000 copies sold of each issue — is so small and because it's so difficult to improve newsstand sales of a magazine aimed at a specialized audience.*

*We discussed the matter of ragged versus justified columns a few issues ago; yours is one of the very few comments we've received on this. Anyone else? Please??*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Picked up November issue on newsstand shelf yesterday. Read all the way through tonight, including going to bed. Got up again and came down to typewriter to address you. Hope you understand it is going on 4 A.M. Damn, you have made good ole *Amazing* into something good, and my sleep will never be the same. One of these days I will actually subscribe because they do not seem to carry every issue at the store.

Comment: on your page 76. DUKENFIELD, not DUNKENFIELD. Many years ago I knew the family (am a Philadelphian originally). A much under-rated man.

The references in Silverberg's "Opinion" and Catalano's "Book Reviews," about a lack of Science in science fiction: not too long ago some people wrote in to some other SF editor and asked how they could get somebody who knew science to help write some SF stories they had in mind. I was reminded of the people who write a novel first and then add the sex. That other editor did not seem at all astonished but advised them on collaborating with someone who knew science. Isn't anybody indignant about someone planning to write SF without assuming he needs to know science first? Doesn't it have to just naturally be a part of the way the thing develops? Yes, there are a lot of "writers" around who think you do it by letting free association flow onto the paper, but I am old-fashioned.

Rinehart S. Potts  
Glassboro NJ

*Okay, here's an example of how newsstand sales are converted into subscriptions. Only — how many of the conversions are casual pickups and how many regular, faithful newsstand*

*buyers? We don't — yet — have any idea how many of our 10,000 or so newsstand sales of each issue are random, impulse sales and how many are regulars who don't trust the Post Office. (They needn't worry: we ship the magazine sealed in envelopes at (so far) no extra charge to subscribers.)*

*And yes, it does help to know some branch of science in order to write science fiction — but we suspect it's more to grasp the nature of scientific progress and scientific thought and the fact of change itself than it is to get all the rivers designed correctly on your story's spacecraft. Science, you know by now, doesn't depend on Revealed Wisdom, as do Law and Religion — now, if you want to tell a tale of **people** beset by the problems of Law **becoming** our Established Religion, you'd best have some knowledge about how both Law and Religion operate at present — and it would be helpful to know enough of Science to know how it's different from Law and Religion; but such a story would probably require no knowledge of Astronomy whatever.*

*The important ways that writers cope are to ask — to do research — for what they must find out and to avoid details they don't know and the story doesn't need; if the author doesn't understand solid-state electronics, then the author's point of view character is someone who doesn't either.*

— George Scithers

Dear George,

What joy! The January issue made it into my grubby little hands just in time to bring it to the World Fantasy Con where Bob Bloch, Phyllis Eisenstein, and Fred Pohl were gathered. Did you (you sly fox) or did you not plan the issue around WFC? Smart marketing move!



Another smart move was publishing Bruce Bethke's "Cyberpunk" in the November issue. The story kind of grows on the reader and elicits chuckles long after he thought his system purged. I, for one, eagerly wait to see how Rayno gets the kid out of this one, the next one, and the one after that. There will be sequels, won't there?

We're all glad to see *Amazing* back on the right track. I meant it when I sighed "What Joy!" Under current editorship *Amazing* has an underriding current of humor that appeals to SF&F readers' quick wit. How many fen are punsters? How many filksongs are plays on words?

Do I make sense? Or am I so burnt out after a con? No partying, honest. Just long hours trying to corner Kirby McCauley long enough to read a novel manuscript (complete, really it is) I foolishly brought along to WFC. Don and Elsie Wollheim encouraged me to send it to them in New York. McCauley encouraged me to send it to Sharon Jarvis (does he have a grudge against her or something?) in Staten Island.

Anyway, with all that encouragement I decided to send you a poem. I suppose I could tell you that during the '60s I was a relatively respected poet and occasional editor of small literary magazines. I'd forgotten all about those credentials until I ran into a young lady at Fantasy Con who actually had a copy of a 1966 anthology with some of my things in it and . . . guess what? She asked for my autograph!

Best always,  
Dale Anderson  
Oak Park IL

*As for sequels to "Cyberpunk," see the next letter. In the matter of taking*

*manuscripts to SF or fantasy conventions for editors to read: don't. Editors prefer to receive manuscripts at their offices, where they (the MSS, not the editors) can be properly logged in, read in a relatively quiet place, and then rejected (or whatever) without worrying that the rejected MS's writer will Take It Badly.*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

The January '84 *Amazing* arrived in the mail yesterday, and David L. Mays's rather — uh — remarkable missive finally prodded me into finishing this letter. I've been in the process of writing it for the last three months or so.

First, I'd like to say thanks for putting out a great magazine. I was a loyal reader of *Asimov's* from its second year until complete Momusification set it and I couldn't stand it anymore. It appears with *Amazing* you've got more liberty to deal with adult-subjects/darker-themes or something; in any event the quality of *Amazing* seems tangibly higher than *Asimov's*. I actually broke down and subscribed, which is something I haven't done since *Galaxy* bought the farm. (I have this deep innate resistance to letting anyone else control my reading input. I always got my *Asimov's* at a newsstand.)

Second, I'd like to offer this testimonial to all the David Mayses out there; Mr. Scithers knows what he's talking about. When I started sending stories to *Asimov's* four or five years ago I got back some pretty grim critiques.

But by accepting the criticism and learning from it, I gradually became somewhat better at the craft. Eventually I wrote a story that didn't come back. Instead, I got a cheerful letter and an even more cheerful check.

Of course, my reaction was that I had finally "broken through" and was now entitled to all the rights and privileges of a True Artist. I could act like a boor at parties; I could terrorize booksellers' conventions; I could sell anything that oozed out of my word processor. We'll skip this grim period.

In time I grew up and became Documentation Group Leader/Editor for a computer software company, where I discovered a most remarkable thing. All of the rules about clear writing Mr. Scithers kept propounding are valid. If I have to spend time correcting spelling because the writer didn't, that's wasted time I could have applied to improving the quality of our output. If I have trouble reading the copy submitted to me because of the way it's typed, I'm already prejudiced against accepting it. If the organizational structure is so obscure I have to map it while I read . . .

Excuse me. I seem to be up on this soapbox.

Anyway I'd just like to express my gratitude for your publication of "Cyberpunk," and for the years of patient criticism. However, if one more person says, "Oh, did you see *War Games?*" . . .

If you noticed a surge in sales when the November issue hit the newsstands, it was my wife buying up and giving away every copy she could find. (I think the pizza delivery boy would have preferred a tip, though.) This brings me to the real reason I started this letter three months ago.

Compared to *Analog* or *Asimov's*, *Amazing* is rather hard to find in this area. While I realize that we're talking about two different distribution chains, it seems that DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® stuff is just about everywhere. How about if the staff of *Amazing* were to put out an Official D&D®

Swords 'n' Sorcery Anthology? You could do it semi-annually (longer shelf life), put the D&D® logo prominently on the cover, and make sure it's got a big plug for *Amazing* inside the front cover — maybe even a bingo card for subscribing. Possibly even do it in a 9x12 format (like *Asimov's Adventure*) for greater visibility.

It's not that I'm in love with D&D®, but I oddly enough have a certain amount of personal ego tied up in the success of *Amazing* and I think you need a higher market profile to achieve that success.

I also realize that there are probably 6 good reasons why this can't be done. I just thought I'd toss out the idea.

Finally, in case you ever wondered why I never sent a sequel to "Cyberpunk": In the last year I've done about 30 manuals and a 140-(printed)-page book on Digital Synthesis (now in 2nd printing).

This has tended to cut into my fiction writing.

Again, thank you  
Bruce Bethke  
St. Paul MN

*Probably pays better, too.  
\*s\*j\*g\*h\*.*

*We have been working on a couple of anthology projects, but they're in abeyance at the moment. We gotta get more subs first! As for the 9x12 (or 8 1/4x11) size, with the exception of Omni and Twilight Zone, every magazine that tried it for science fiction on newsstands failed at it. Including (alas) Asimov's SF Adventure Magazine.*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

A few additions to your answer to David Mays's letter (January 1984) about the problems of breaking into print: I'm no expert, since I only have

a few publication credits, but I do think I have found some of the outlook that a would-be writer needs.

To start with, *of course* a Fritz Leiber or Avram Davidson story will be published over an equally good story by me. In fact, my story could be slightly better and still lose out. Why? Not because editors sharpen their teeth on new writers, or even because they are Philistines who wipe their hands on the tablecloth and don't appreciate my undoubted genius. The fact is that editors work in a commercial world, and a well-known name on the cover sells the magazine. Mine just hides more of a Kelly Freas cover. Its appearance may delight my aged mother; anyone else just shrugs. The situation is unfair, and worth a good cry on the pillow. But the alternative could be no market for anyone, or worse, the small-press atrocities that lie unread on university bookshelves. Short of giving up, however, all I can do is try to write *much* better than the Old Pros. After all, if I'm only doing what they did long ago, why waste my time, or claim a piece of anybody else's? If I do do something original, sooner or later some editor will notice the fact.

Similarly, there are levels of accessibility. Personal experience teaches me that your work is considered more seriously if you have an agent. Clarion graduates are more likely to be known to an editor than other new writers are. Name writers may have dined or worked before with the editor. A plot, complete with mail drops and fallback points? Sorry, Mr. Mays, not even "whore-mongering." Just the human tendency to give special attention to the unusual, and the benefit of the doubt to those you know. Since editors are virtually indistinguishable from people, you can be sure that they share

this trait, too. Like most people, they may not be aware of what they are doing. But since they are doing it, and can't act differently even if they are aware of it, why bother to blame them? Far better to try and take advantage of the fact, if only by going to cons or writing letters to magazines.

As for judging a manuscript by its format, on the whole the idea is sound. If I am functionally illiterate, I lack the basic skills of the writing trade. If I lack the basics, chances are that characterization and plotting are just as mysterious to me. Of course, they may not be, but editors have to burrow out of the slush pile somehow.

Finally, why lose sleep over the comments on a rejection? I am only going to do one of two things in the end: take it, or ignore it. Best to decide now, and avoid the subconscious rush. If I take the advice, I disinter the story's corpse — if I can bring myself to — and see if the advice resurrects it. If I ignore it, I mutter a few carefully selected comments about the editors' relation to small farm animals. I go for a run, chanting my special Rejection Mantra (*puffa, Goddam, puffa, Goddam*). As soon as possible, I get back to work. Time spent in the care and feeding of your ego is wasted, and if I collapse because of a comment or two, I should probably stop writing. I mean, if I can't accept an editor's opinion, how will I ever handle a reviewer's?

Sincerely,  
Bruce Byfield  
Burnaby, B.C.

P.S. — A Doctor Eszterhazy story by Davidson in one issue, and a Keith Roberts story in the next? What are you trying to do? Make me think I've stumbled into Shangri-La?

*Competition for space is often less in*

a magazine than in a line of books; if we get first-rate stories from both Jane Doe and a big-name authoress, we may buy **both**.

As for having an agent — we don't think it's a general rule. If we get a manuscript submitted by an agent of whom we have never before heard, especially if the agent lives in neither New York City nor Los Angeles, our first assumption is that the agent is merely the author in a not-so-clever plastic disguise. We react to Big Name agents — that is, agents who are known to screen manuscripts carefully, to demand revisions from their authors before manuscripts go to editors, and even to reject manuscripts that would do the reputations of the author and the agent no good — as we react to Big Name authors: with care.

Format? Well, if one isn't smart enough to figure out how to ask for — or look up — the standard format instructions, then we tend to assume that one isn't smart enough to write science fiction either. There are exceptions, but they are very rare.

— George Scithers

Dear George,

I am, as you know, not a fan but a writer. I've never written a letter to any magazine before. But comments that I've read in other magazines, and particularly David L. Mays's letter in your Jan. '84 issue, have caused me to become so angry that I simply had no other recourse but to vent my anger in print.

Perhaps as a very new professional, I've not yet earned the right to this opinion, but I'm sick and damn tired of writers blaming editors for the rejection of their work. I get even angrier when they unjustly accuse you. Those of us who work in the field know you as one of the hardest work-

ing, most caring, friendliest editors in the business. I have many rejections from you, all personal letters, all containing valuable criticisms, and *all* serving to encourage me to continue. That's your job, and you do it very, very well.

It's my job as the writer to see that my story fits your needs and is as good as I can make it. If my work isn't good enough, it's not my place to rail and bitch at you, but to go back to work. I have hundreds of rejections, and I have yet to find an editor who rejected me unjustly or without valid reason. Invariably, stories are rejected for only two reasons: A. The story doesn't fit the editor's concept of what he wants for the mag (again, my responsibility is to study and know the market); or B. The story simply isn't good enough. Knowing that, why should I blame the editor for my own shortcomings? I don't have time. I just put the story in an envelope and send it right back out, no problem.

Perhaps I have an advantage in having served as an editor. I've seen the MSS that are sent out, from perfectly awful stories prepared nicely, to what might have been wonderful stories, had the MSS been at all readable. I've done my share of rejecting including, painfully, rejecting a story by my hero and very favorite author in the world. I've had my share of writers railing at me for their own problems. I know that it does hurt to receive those letters when you've done your best.

Perhaps I'm luckier than most in having been befriended by successful, older writers who believe in my talent and have taught me the value of the right attitude towards working, the right attitude towards editors, and the right attitudes about life in general. I've always thought that was the way every writer worked through the

apprenticeship and became a member of the family. I guess not. But I really fail to understand why anyone has the gall to blame the editor for his own lousy stories. Mays mentions F. Scott Fitzgerald's relationship with Maxwell Perkins, the editor who helped him. What he fails to take into consideration is that Fitzgerald's work was most likely good enough to start with to make it worth the editor's time in helping him. Editors do help, immensely; but it, of course, has to be in a selfish way, a way that brings the editor new talent, worthwhile talent and good writing.

In closing, I would ask Mays to think about this. Writers, *real* writers, don't waste their time pissing and moaning about how unjustly they've been treated by editors. As a rule they, and I, are much too busy with important matters like actually writing. No, I haven't yet sold a story to George Scithers. But I'm enough of a professional to keep trying until I do because as editors go, George, you're the best. And more importantly, I and many others know that you truly care. Luckily, those writers who have nothing better to do than complain will probably never reach a professional level. And all I can say is, thank Tao for that.

Happy Trails

R. L. Leming  
Lancaster CA

*Not to divert attention from all those nice things you've said about us, but the old saying has it that when would-be writers gather, they talk about Art and Meaning and their Latest Projects, while when professional, working writers gather, they talk about money.*

*Perhaps we're dwelling on writing and rejecting too much here — but it's what we do most of the time (rejecting, that is); and were it not for all those*

*new, hopeful writers and their manuscripts in the mail every day, science fiction would be dead, dead, dead! Rejection hurts; we know, and we've been there. But, as we've said and as these three writers have hinted, editors don't reject people: they reject pieces of paper that have been typed on.*

Writer's Digest recently published (with our permission, of course) an extract from our booklet, *Constructing Scientification & Fantasy*. In subsequent correspondence, Bill Brohaugh, the editor at WD, commented that the writer must realize that he's a salesman, and the editor is a potential buyer. One mustn't snap at people who decide not to buy your used cars, fresh fish, or whatever — not and stay in the used-car, fresh-fish, and so on businesses. The same applies to writers, though we editors are rather more tolerant about this point than most used-car and fresh-fish customers are.

— George Scithers

Dear George (Darrell? Dainis? Whoever edits letters),

Somebody up there has an odd idea about science fiction. The blurb for Avram's story implies that any fiction about change is "true science fiction." Now, I like historical fiction as well as anyone, but I will hotly deny that it's actually science fiction because it's about change. The Eszterhazy stories might qualify as science fiction because they're located in a parallel world, but what's wrong with calling them fantasy and being, as they say, done with it?

Also, Silverberg says that "hard" SF is so called because the authors provide a solid theoretical underpinning. No. It's called hard SF because the premise of the story is based on one of the so-called "hard" sciences — math, chemistry, physics — as opposed to the

"soft" sciences of psychology, sociology, and so on. And the sciences are called "hard" because *they* have rigid standards for theoretical proofs.

Apropos of Avram's story, jimson weed may drive goats to a frenzy, but it made a very nice asthma and hay fever remedy when dried and smoked. Certain deleterious side effects: continued use led to such problems as high blood pressure, faulty circulation, and book reviewing, but it *did* stop the wheezing. Did, I may say — in fact, I will say — because the government halted its dissemination some years ago. Official reason *may* have been that book reviewing is a dangerous occupation for anyone with high blood pressure. Or may not have been. Natheless, jimson weed has an honored place in the world; I venture to say that none of the gentle readers ever saw a wheezing goat.

Buck [Robert] Coulson  
Hartford City IN

We didn't say only SF, and in fifty words or fewer one can't be very discursive. You've given us a chance to say that Alfred Duggan's novels are well worth looking up — The Little Emperors, The Lady for Ransom,

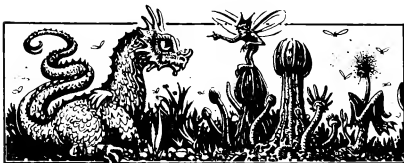
Three's Company, and others. Duggan was very good at portraying incomprehension — and sometimes sudden understanding — of those who haven't realized that the times have changed.

— Dainis Bisenieks

Any letter sent to the publishers' address, PO Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147-0110, will be forwarded to us in Philadelphia. Letters so routed get to be read by those of us in Lake Geneva, too. We've been careful about publishing our address in Philadelphia (which is PO Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101-8243), because we do **NOT** want the Philadelphia address to get into reference books and the like. (We're still having to have Elinor Mavor and Arthur Bernhard forward material from the Arizona address, which is over two years out of date; and some material comes in from even older addresses.) Please treat the Philadelphia address as one that's good only so long as we keep mentioning it in the magazine; meanwhile, it's good for manuscripts (but get our booklet *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy first!*) and for letters.

— George Scithers

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# A LANTERN MAKER OF AI HANLO

by Darrell Schweitzer

art: Tim Kirk

*This story is part of a series, set millions of years hence, when the 20th century is not even a memory and the Goddess of Earth has recently died, if that is the right word, the godhead having broken up into countless short-lived fragments, or Powers. In the ensuing metaphysical chaos, all manner of wondrous and terrifying things have become possible. The stories will be collected into a book, Echoes of the Goddess, to be published by Starblaze in late 1985 as a companion to Mr. Schweitzer's novel, The Shattered Goddess. It is not, he hastens to inform us, the second volume of a trilogy. He is the founder and sole member of the Society for the Reduction of the Number of Trilogies in Fantasy Fiction (SRNTFF).*

*A previous "Goddess" tale, "The Story of a Dādar," appeared in the June 1982 Amazing.*

In Zabortash, all men are magicians. The air is so thick with magic that you can catch a spirit or a spell with a net on any street corner. Women wear their hair short, lest they find ghosts tangled in it. Still, they find them in their hats.

In Zabortash, even the lantern makers work wonders: the present moon is not the first to shine upon the Earth. The old one went out when the Goddess died, but a Zabortashi lantern maker consulted with a magus, and was directed to that hidden stairway which leads into the sky. He hung his finest lantern in the darkness, in the night, that the stars might not grow over-proud in their brilliance, that men might know the duration of the month again.

In Zabortash, a land far to the south and filled with sluggish rivers, with swamps and steaming jungles, the air is so thick that in the darkness, in the night, the face of the moon ripples.

So it is said.

In Zabortash, further, for that all the folk are magicians, there are men who love their wives, who look on their children with pride when they are young and wistfulness when they are old enough to remind the parents what they were like in their youth.

In Zabortash, people know beauty and feel joy, and know and feel also hurt and hunger and sorrow.

So it is said.





In the time of the death of the Goddess, there dwelt a lantern maker in Zabortash named Talnaco Ramat who was skilled in his art. He was a young man, and wholly in love with the maiden Mirithemne, but she would not have him, being of a higher caste than he, and he would not be satisfied with any other. Therefore he labored long on a lantern of special design. He cut intricate shapes into the shell of it, making holes for light to shine through. The lantern was like a metal box, as tall as an outstretched hand, rectangular with a domed top and a metal ring hinged onto the dome to serve as a handle. At the outset, it was like any other lantern Talnaco Ramat might make, but he inlaid it with precious stones and plated it with gold. He carved schools of fish into it, swimming around the base, and those winged lizards called *kwisi*, which hop from branch to branch and are supposed to bring constancy and long life. He carved hills and villages, the winding river which is called Endless, and he fashioned the top half of the lantern into the shape of Ai Hanlo, the holiest of cities and center of the world, where the bones of the Goddess lie in blessed splendor. That city is built on a mountain; at the summit stands a golden dome, beneath which the Guardian of the Bones of the Goddess holds court. In this likeness was the dome of the lantern made, complete with tiny windows, and ringed with battlements and towers.

Finally, Talnaco Ramat carved his own image and that of his beloved into the metal. He depicted the two of them walking hand in hand along the bank of the river, going up to the city.

Then he lit a candle inside the lantern and carried it into a darkened loft. Light streamed through the carved metal, and all his creations were outlined by it. As he watched, the river seemed to flow. The images were projected onto the walls and roof of the loft. Then he was not in the loft at all, but beside Mirithemne. All around them lizards hopped from branch to branch, wings buzzing, fleshy tails dangling.

Mirithemne smiled. The day was bright and clear. Rivermen sang as they poled a barge along. A great *drontha*, a warship of the Holy Empire, crawled against the current like a centipede on its banks of oars.

They came to the holy city, entering through the Sunrise Gate, mingling with the crowds. They passed through the square where mendicants waited below the wall that shut them out of the Guardian's palace. Once a week, he explained to Mirithemne, priests came to the top of that wall, and, holding aloft reliquaries containing splinters of the bones of the Goddess, blessed the people below. Miraculous cures still happened, but they were not as common as they had once been. The power of the Goddess was fading.

He led Mirithemne to a house at the end of a narrow lane. A wooden sign with a lantern painted on it hung over the door. He got out a key.

"This will be our home," he said.

He unlocked the door and went in, only to find himself alone in the loft,

with the candle of the lantern sputtering out.

He was satisfied. The lantern was adequate.

That night, in the darkness, after the moon had set, he spoke a spell into the open door of the lantern and it filled with a light softer than candle-flame, with vapors excited by the ardor of his love.

He climbed onto the roof of his shop and set the lantern down on a ledge. He spoke the name of his beloved three times, and he spoke other words. Then he gently pushed the lantern off the ledge.

It hung suspended in air, and drifted off like a lazy, glowing moth on a gentle breeze. He sat for a time, watching it disappear over the rooftops of the town.

But the next morning he found the lantern on his doorstep. Its light had gone out and its shell was tarnished. He knew then for a certainty that his suit was hopeless. A sorrow lodged in his heart, which never left him.

The sign was very clear.

So Talnaco Ramat transported himself to Ai Hanlo by some means which comes as easily to a Zaborman as breathing. The great distance was traversed, the tangled way made straight, dangers avoided, and the lantern maker came to the Sunrise Gate, dragging a two-wheeled cart filled with his belongings.

For a moment he had the idea that he would become rich here in Ai Hanlo, since the folk there had surely never seen anything as wondrous as a finely-wrought Zabortashi lantern.

He was wrong. There was no novelty. In fact, there are so many magicians in Zabortash that many of them go abroad in search of work. A number of them had settled in Ai Hanlo. Some of those made lanterns. He had to join a guild and pay a share of his earnings, but it was a comfort to be surrounded by men and women who spoke his own language. They found a place for him to live and work.

It was a house at the end of a narrow lane, with a wooden sign over the door.

He prospered in his new life and seemed to forget his old. In time he married a woman of the city called Kachelle, and she bore him three daughters, and, later, a son, whom he named Venda. His life passed peacefully as his family grew. He made lanterns of great complexity and beauty and sold them to nobles of the city, even to the Guardian himself. For all that, he was never too proud to turn out a simple oil lamp, or even to mold candlesticks.

So his years were filled. Then his daughters married, and went to live with their husbands. Later, his wife Kachelle died, and he had only Venda, his youngest, for company. He taught the boy every facet of his craft, all the secrets of magic that he knew. He knew only little spells and shallow magic — he was not a magus who could make the world tremble

at his gaze — but to Venda it was impressive.

In time Venda married, and brought his wife to live with his father. As his sisters had done before him, he made his father a grandfather, and the house was filled with the shouts of children, and the sounds of their running feet, not to mention the clangor and crash when one of them blundered into a pile of lanterns.

All these children were of the city. They spoke without the accent of Zabortash, as did Venda's wife, who never seemed quite convinced that Zabortash was a real place, and that the stories about it were other than fables. Venda himself had never been there.

So Talnaco Ramat began to feel alone, a stranger once more in a strange country. For the first time in decades he began to long for his homeland and the places of his youth.

One day, while rummaging in the loft above his shop, he found something wrapped in an oily rag. He unwrapped it, and beheld the tarnished lantern he had made for Mirithemne, so long ago. He had forgotten about it all these years. Now memories flooded back.

Once again he saw himself on the rooftop, watching the lantern float above the town. He remembered the songs he had composed for Mirithemne, and the letters he had labored over with uncertain penmanship. He remembered the great fairs of Zabortash, where grand magi and lesser magicians and craftsmen of all sorts came together to conjoin their magic, that the Earth might continue to follow the sun through the universe now that the Goddess was dead, and not be lost in the darkness, in the night. There were wares displayed, feats performed. The high born women of the land were in attendance, among them Mirithemne. He smiled at her, and waved, and even spoke with her when she mingled with the crowd of common folk. She smiled back — was it out of politeness, or something more?

Talnaco Ramat remembered what it is like to be young.

Therefore he took up the lantern and carefully polished it, until it shone as it had on the day of its completion. He oiled the hinges of its door.

He waited for evening with barely controlled excitement, speaking to his son and his son's family about trifling things, his mind far removed in time and space.

High up Ai Hanlo Mountain, a soldier blew a curving horn that hung from an arch, announcing that the sun had set.

Talnaco Ramat went out into the cool evening air, bearing the lantern. The dome of the Guardian's palace still glowed with the last light of day. He came to a courtyard he knew, which was filled with trees. It was the autumn of the year, and dead leaves rustled underfoot. He sat down on a stone bench and looked up at the dome, waiting for it to grow dark.

He was alone. The night was quiet, but for occasional distant noises of the city.

When the time came, he did not hesitate. He lit a candle and placed it inside the lantern with a steady hand, speaking as he did the most powerful spells he knew. The candle burned more brightly than it would have with mere flame. He closed the door of the lantern and at once the intricate carvings in the metal shell were outlined in fire. He set the lantern down on the bench and knelt before it, entranced by the shifting shapes. The glowing fishes swam in the air before his eyes. The Endless River flowed around him, its fiery waters splashing over the walls of the courtyard, swirling between the tree trunks. Everywhere, spirits of the air were suddenly visible in the magic light: glowing, stick-legged things wading in the earth like impossible herons; an immense serpent beneath the ground, engirdling the world, its gold and silver scales polished bright as mirrors. He saw turning at the world's core that great rose, half of fire, half of darkness, where dwell the Bright and Dark Powers, the fragments of the godhead.

He turned away from all this, drawing his awareness back into himself, into the courtyard. He concentrated on the lantern before him. It seemed to float in the air. The light grew brighter, brighter; the door opened and he was blinded.

When he could see again, he was by the side of the river called Endless, at a spot he knew well. Mirithemne was with him. He could not see her, but he sensed her presence. She was just beyond the periphery of his vision. He spoke; she did not answer; but he knew she heard.

He was still kneeling, as he had been in the courtyard. He got to his feet, expecting every joint to ache with the strain, but he found that, although he still wore the clothes he had as an old man, and his tools were still in the pockets of his apron, he was young again. He got up easily. He looked at his beard and saw that it was no longer white.

When he walked, he heard Mirithemne's footsteps beside him, but when he turned, she was not there. He continued walking. The sky was clear and the day warm.

He came to the mouth of a cave in the side of a hill which sloped down to meet the river. From within he heard a voice crying, "I am burning!"

He rushed inside, and there found an anchorite writhing on the floor of the cave. The man was dressed in rags. His beard and hair were matted with dirt. His skin was brown and wrinkled, like old leather, but there was no fire.

"I prayed for it. Long I prayed for it. Now I have it, and I am burning," the anchorite said, his voice frenzied.

"What have you prayed for? You don't seem to be burning," Talnaco said, puzzled. He turned to Mirithemne, sure that she would understand, but she was not there.

"I prayed," said the anchorite. "I prayed that a fragment of the Goddess would settle on me, that I might be made as holy as she. Oh, it was an arrogant wish! But now it is fulfilled, and I am burning with the spirit. Soon I will be completely consumed."

Before the lantern maker could reply, the other began to babble. He prophesied in tongues, but there was no one to understand his prophecies, except perhaps Mirithemne. He spoke the thousand names of the Goddess, first the common ones, then those known to sages, then those which only the greatest of Guardians may apprehend but dimly, and finally all the rest, which never before had been spoken.

Talnaco waited patiently while he was doing all this.

At last the holy man sat up, and stared at the lantern maker in a distracted way.

"You too are burning," he said.

"No, it's not like that at all."

The holy man fell down once more, writhing. He babbled. Then he was calm and lay with his eyes closed, as if he were sleeping. Slowly, with apparent deliberation, he spoke the name of Mirithemne.

Talnaco fled. For a time he lost his way in a dark forest, but still his beloved seemed to be with him. For days and nights he travelled, resting little. When he finally emerged from the forest, the river was before him again. Once more an imperial *drontha* crawled against the current on the legs of its oars. Once more the rivermen sang as they poled their barge.

He made his way to Ai Hanlo, entering through the Sunrise Gate. He followed streets he knew until he stood before his own door. The key was in the pocket of his apron. He went inside. The place was filled with dust and cobwebs. At once he set to work cleaning it, making it ready for the practice of his craft.

So again a young Zabortashi lantern maker established himself in Ai Hanlo. He labored long and hard, selling excellent lanterns to the best clients. In each lantern, somewhere among the intricacies of the design, he carved the image of Mirithemne, all the while sensing her nearness. She became more evident every day. He found his bed rumpled when he had not slept in it. His cupboard was left open when he had closed it. He heard footsteps. He heard shutters and doors opening and closing, but when he went to see, no one was there.

One day he found a woman's comb on a chair. There were long, yellow hairs in it. Mirithemne's hair was like that. Then he found her mirror, and when he looked into it, he saw someone staring over his shoulder.

He turned. The carpet on the floor moved slightly, but he was alone in the room.

At last, as he sat in his workshop in the upper room of the house, just below the loft, there were gentle footsteps on the stairway outside, followed by a light rapping at the door.

"Enter," he said.

The door opened slowly, but no one entered. He got up, and found Mirithemne's lantern on the threshold.

The sign was very clear.

Therefore Talnaco Ramat bore the lantern into a courtyard he knew. It was sunset, in the autumn of the year. High above the city, a soldier blew on a curving horn. The light of the golden dome faded, while the light of the lantern grew brighter.

The door of the lantern opened. His eyes were dazzled. He fell to his knees.

And when he could see again, Mirithemne stood before him, holding the lantern, as graceful and as beautiful as he had remembered her. She smiled at him, and, reaching down, took his hand in hers and lifted him to his feet. Then she danced to music he could not hear, her long dress whirling, the leaves whirling, the golden shapes projected by the lantern whirling over the walls, the trees, the ground, over Talnaco himself as she danced, the lantern in hand.

He could never imagine her more perfect than she was at that moment.

Later, she was in his arms and they spoke words of love. Later still he sat with his memories, and it seemed he had lived out his life with her, in the shop at the end of the narrow lane, in the city, and that he had grown old. Still Mirithemne was with him. He vaguely remembered how it had been otherwise, but he was not sure of it, and this troubled him.

He vaguely remembered that he had a son called Venda. He was old. He was getting confused. He would ask Mirithemne.

In the darkness, in the night, Venda made his way up a narrow, sloping street that ended in a stairway, climbed the stairway, and came to the wall which separates the lower, or outer part of Ai Hanlo from the inner city, where dwell the Guardian of the Bones of the Goddess, his priests, his courtiers, and his soldiers. Venda could not go beyond the wall, but he could open a certain door, and slide into an unlighted room no larger than a closet, closing the door behind him.

He dropped a coin into a bowl and rang a bell. A window slid open in front of him. He could see nothing, but he heard a priest breathing.

"The power of the Goddess fades like an echo in a cave," the priest said, "but perhaps enough lingers to comfort you."

"I don't come for myself," Venda said, and he explained how he had watched his father go into a courtyard with an old lantern and vanish in a flash of light.

The priest came out and went with him. He saw that the priest was very young, little more than a boy, and he wondered if he would be able to do anything. But he said nothing, out of respect. Then he realised that this was a certain Tamliade, something of a prodigy, already renowned for his

visions.

They came to the courtyard and found the lantern, still glowing brightly. The priest opened its door. The light was dazzling. For a time Venda saw nothing. For a time they seemed to walk on pathways of light, through forests of frozen fire.

They found Talnaco Ramat sitting in the mouth of a cave, with the lantern before him, its door open, the light from within brilliant.

"Father, return with us," Venda said.

"Go away. I am with my beloved."

Venda saw no one but himself, his father, and the priest, but before he could say anything, his father reached out and snapped the door of the lantern shut.

The scene vanished, like a reflection in a pool shattered by a stone.

They found themselves in the courtyard, standing before the lantern, which rested on the bench. Again the priest opened the little door, and the light was blinding. The priest led Venda by the hand. When he could see again, they were walking after his father, up the road to the Sunrise Gate of Ai Hanlo. His father hurried with long strides, bearing the lantern. Its door was open. The light was less brilliant than before.

"Father —"

"Sir," said the boy priest. "Come away."

Talnaco stopped suddenly and turned to the priest.

"What do you know of the ways of love, young man?"

"Why — why, nothing."

"Then you will not understand why I won't go with you."

"Father," said Venda softly.

Talnaco snapped the door of the lantern shut.

"If you want to get another priest, do so, but it won't do any good," the boy Tamliade said.

They stood in the courtyard, in the darkness, in the night.

"It's not that," Venda said. "What do we do now?"

"We merely follow him to where he is going. He has gone far already."

The priest opened the door of the lantern. The light was dim. It seemed to flow out, like the waters of the river, splashing over the ground and between the trees.

Again they stood by the riverbank. An imperial *drontha* went by. Boatmen poled a barge.

Venda followed the priest. They came to a cave, where lay the blackened, shrivelled corpse of an anchorite. They passed through the dark forest and eventually into Ai Hanlo, along a narrow street, until they came to the shop with the wooden sign over its door.

The door was unlocked. The two of them went quietly inside, then up

the stairs until they stood before the door to Talnaco Ramat's workroom.

Venda rapped gently.

"Enter," came the voice from within. They entered, and saw Talnaco seated at his workbench, polishing a lantern. He looked older and more tired than Venda had ever seen him before.

"Father, you are in a dream."

His father smiled and said gently, "You are a true son. I am glad that you care about me."

"None of this is real," the priest said, gesturing with a sweep of his hand.

"Do you think I don't know that? I have lived out my life suspended in a single, golden moment of time. It doesn't make any difference. Mirithemne is with me."

He glanced at the empty air as if he were looking at someone.

"This thing you think is your beloved," the priest said, "is in truth some spirit or Power, some fragment of the Goddess which has entered your mind through the lantern, like a moth drawn to a random flame. It is without form or intelligence. Your longing gives it a certain semblance of a shape, but it loves you no more than do the wind and the rain."

"Perhaps I am in love with the mere memory of being in love. Perhaps . . . in my memory now, I remember two lives. In one my wife was called Kachelle, in the other Mirithemne. In both, I had a son, Venda. Both are in my memory now. How shall I weigh them and know which is the more true?"

Venda looked helplessly at the priest, whose face was expressionless.

"I am tired," said Talnaco Ramat. He rose, taking the lantern, and walked slowly out of the room. The light was very faint now. They followed him to the courtyard. By the time he set the lantern down on the bench, the light had gone out.

The priest snapped the metal door shut. Then he and Venda led Talnaco home. He was delirious with fever.

"He is burned by the spirit," the priest said. "There is little we can do."

They sat by Talnaco's bedside, as he lay dying. Venda wept. Toward the very end, the old man was lucid.

"Do not weep, son," he said. "I have known great happiness in both of my lives."

"Father, was there ever someone called Mirithemne, or did you imagine her?"

"She is real enough. She's probably old and ugly now. I don't think she ever knew my name."

Venda wept.

At the very end, his father said, "I have found the greatest treasure. It was worth the struggle."



Venda did not answer, but the priest leaned forward, and whispered,  
“What is it?”

“A smile. A touch. Whirling leaves. A single moment frozen in time.”



## STITCH STITCH STITCH

Oh, typing skills you do not need:  
A seamstress now can stitch your screed,  
Preventing smudges, streaks and smears,  
With Sensor Sew! (on sale at Sears).

It does all letters, twenty-six  
(Plus duckies, fishies, fuzzy chicks),  
Makes heroes, villains, other roles,  
And in between, does buttonholes;

And when your Muse ceases flowing —  
Why, then you catch up on the sewing.

I thought this trick was just so neat,  
I 8-by-10'd an old white sheet  
(Percale, it was, and 50-weight;  
I had to send it Railway Freight),

And wrote, and wrote, and could not stop  
(I thought my bobbin sure would pop):  
All double-space, and double-stitch;  
I knew this tale would make me rich.

Alas! my story didn't go:  
My thread of plot was just sew-sew.

— Wil Creveling

# ROGER ZELAZNY: From Myth to Science Fiction

by Darrell Schweitzer

## INTERVIEW

Roger Zelazny's first two stories appeared simultaneously in the August 1962 issues of *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. He then sold so many more stories to the two magazines that within a few months they were appearing two in an issue, the extra ones under the pseudonym of Harrison Denmark. Most of these were very short, apprenticeship stories; but by the end of 1963, Zelazny was clearly on the verge of becoming a major author. His "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" appeared in the November 1963 *F&SF*, and also on the Hugo ballot that year. It has since become a recognized classic, and was afforded the singular honor of being the only story from the entire decade of the 1960s to be included in the *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* short story volume.

Zelazny continued to appear in *Amazing* and *Fantastic* until the end of the Goldsmith editorship in 1965. Indeed, he had stories in the final Goldsmith issues of both titles. By this time, he was well beyond any apprenticeship. His "He Who Shapes" (*Amazing*, Jan-Feb 1965) won a Nebula award and was later expanded into the novel *The Dream Master*, which many consider to be Zelazny's finest work. Another 1965 serial, from *F&SF*, . . . *And Call Me Conrad* (later retitled *This Immortal*) won a Hugo, beating such awesome competition as Frank Herbert's *Dune* to a draw. More successes followed. There was another Hugo for *Lord of Light*, as best novel of 1967. Many more stories and novels were finalists. "Home is the Hangman" won for best novella of 1976. *Nine Princes in Amber* and its four sequels became

one of the most popular series in modern fantasy. (And the first volume, which had a very limited first edition, has since been named in a prominent reference work as one of the ten most desirable collector's items in the field, a distinction few writers see in their own lifetime.) Other novels include *Jack of Shadows*, *Bridge of Ashes*, *Damnation Alley*, *Today We Choose Faces*, *Doorways in the Sand*, *Isle of the Dead*, *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, *Roadmarks*, *Changeling*, *Madwand*, *Coils* (with Fred Saberhagen), and — most recently — *Eye of Cat*. Zelazny appeared in *Amazing* twice in 1981, with a short story, "The Naked Matador" (July), and an excerpt from *Madwand* (September).

**Q:** How long were you trying to write before you started to sell?

**Zelazny:** I actually started in early 1962 — February 26th. The letter of acceptance for my first story was dated March 28th, so it was a little over a month. This excludes a long period, pre-teenage and teenage, when I tried writing stories, from about the age of twelve or thirteen to sixteen or seventeen. These were typical early stories, and they did not sell. The only thing I had printed for money in that period was in *National Scholastic*. I was seventeen when it appeared. But I really didn't count that. I decided near the end of high school that I would wait until I was older and knew a little more before I would try writing again. So when I was in college I wrote poetry almost exclusively.

**Q:** When you started to do stories, they

were very short. Was this because you were interested in the short-short form, or because you couldn't handle anything longer at the time?

**Zelazny:** Actually, at the time I was writing I concentrated on gimmick type stories because I did not possess the skills necessary then to have the stories really turn on character. I felt uncomfortable trying to plot anything at any great length, so I decided I would stay with gimmick stories to get my name a little better known and to get the practice. I resolved to write about different things in each story, so that later, when I did attempt to expand my range, I would have that much more experience. I waited a year before I began stretching the length of the stories, and it was two years before I felt that I'd learned enough to try a novel.

**Q:** I find it a bit unusual that you planned everything out with such deliberation. Was it all planned from the beginning?

**Zelazny:** Well, it may be because I'd had the practice of trying a few hundred short stories when I was much younger. It was a conscious decision to abandon the attempts at the time until I felt better qualified. That postponement gave me a chance to think about it and later to plan an attack, both in the sense of breaking into the market and in plotting the course which I wanted my growth as a writer to take in the first few years. I wanted to learn as much as I could and be selling things at the same time.

**Q:** Did your ideas of what you were doing change as you went along?

**Zelazny:** Yes, and I expected they would. As I learned new things, I imagined they would color my entire attitude toward writing. For instance, I was not sure when I tackled my first novel what my approach would be, and

from that book I learned that I worked in a very comfortable fashion by starting with character and letting the plot be a secondary matter. I would call this subconscious plotting. I learned to place a certain trust in what is basically only a feeling as to whether or not there is a story there, in my subconscious, even though the details are not consciously present. And if I had the feeling, after a number of books, I knew I could rely on it to get me out of plot difficulties. I suppose I could have taken a completely different tack at that point. It could have been a branching point where I might have gone the other way and begun by outlining that book, and remained a very logical plotter throughout my writing career. But I didn't really swing over and do that sort of thing until much later. It could have made a big difference. I might have been writing quite another sort of story now had I gone that route.

**Q:** Do you ever find that the outline-method constricts you and freezes you up because the free-form associations are no longer working?

**Zelazny:** No. Anytime I do outline something, I never consider it sacrosanct. I am quite willing to junk the outline if something better occurs to me. I still have a tendency to create a situation wherein a minor character, who is initially there for the purpose of furthering the action, becomes much more characterized in my mind and begins to grow, becoming a major figure in the story. I enjoy making discoveries like that as things go on. It keeps writing from becoming too cut-and-dried. While I can and do follow outlines, I never follow them to the letter. But occasionally they're a good framework when I'm in a hurry.

**Q:** Using the free-form method, have you ever discovered to your horror that you've written yourself into a hole you

can't get out of?

**Zelazny:** I have written myself into holes, but the subconscious does usually deliver something which seems acceptable to me and to editors too. It is slower when I use the freer approach. But I don't mind that really. I'm not usually pressed for time.

**Q:** The first editor you dealt with regularly was Cele Goldsmith. How much did she influence the way you developed?

**Zelazny:** Not too much. She just began buying stories because she liked them. I know that when I did the first Dilvish story she wrote and suggested that I continue Dilvish as a character. She thought it might make a nice series. She never really gave me writing advice *per se*. She was just an encouraging person in the "keep up the good work" sense, which is always nice to encounter when you're getting started.

**Q:** What were your formative influences, either other writers, editors, or whatever?

**Zelazny:** Well, in the science-fiction field, going back to when I was strictly a fan, the two writers who most impressed me were Stanley Weinbaum and Henry Kuttner. I thought that for the period in which Weinbaum was writing, he was innovative. I admired Kuttner for his versatility. I have always appreciated someone who can change styles and use a great variety of approaches to a wide range of subject matter. I suppose the two of them were influences.

**Q:** One also sees everything from classic tough-guy detectives to Jacobean revenge tragedy in your work.

**Zelazny:** Well, yeah. I was restricting my comments to writing in the science fiction area. I have read an awful lot over the years; and that does make it difficult to pinpoint things from, say, the academic background, which did

involve Elizabethan theatre. My other reading for pleasure involved a great variety of material. In high school I was very fond of Thomas Wolfe, and I suppose there was something from that direction as well as from the Elizabethan theatre — and for that matter from modern poetry. It's sort of hard for me to go beyond that.

**Q:** Has your idea of what you're doing with a story changed along the way? *The Dream Master* seems to be a formal tragedy-cum-medieval-romance, while *Roadmarks* — from your own description — and some of your other recent books seem to be just something for fun and a lot less serious.

**Zelazny:** Oh yes, I suppose it has. I do enjoy getting a bit of humor into a story, even if it is a serious story; and there are times when I don't care to write anything serious at all. I suppose if I had to point to one thing in which I changed over the years, it is that I use more humor now.

**Q:** *Today We Choose Faces* impressed me as a transition between your early mythic work, which went just so far, and the more recent detective-story/thriller-type writing. Would you agree?

**Zelazny:** Well, frankly I got a bit tired of being categorized as a mythological writer. It seemed to imply that that was the only thing I cared to do and perhaps the only thing I could do. So I intentionally tried to write some other things. I guess that it *was* about the time of *Today We Choose Faces*. I suppose *Doorways in the Sand* would fit into that category also. That's another one where I was able to bring in more humor, while *Today We Choose Faces* was more serious. I suppose you could call this an attempt to achieve balance in the total body of things I've written. I want some humor as well as straight realism, and I want something *other*

than myth. But I don't mind re-invoking myth now that I've done some other things. Variety.

**Q:** Well, even in the 1960s you had things like the novella version of *Damnation Alley*, which seemed designed to confuse the people who thought they had you figured out.

**Zelazny:** That wasn't an intentional break with anything that had gone before. It was just an idea I had one day for what I considered a fun piece of writing, with nothing deep and symbolic or any really profound observations on the human condition. I just wanted to do a simple, action-adventure story, and I did.

**Q:** And it went on to — they made a movie *at* you. Or, as Gore Vidal said about *Caligula* with some chagrin, he wasn't making a movie; one was being made to him. But first, about the other things you were writing at that time: what was the attraction of myth for you in that first decade or so of your writing?

**Zelazny:** One thing was that it was easy for me to write about myth because I happened to know a lot about it. The material was there, and I felt I might as well exploit it while I was using the time that elapsed to fill in the gaps in my educational background in order to prepare for other things. It did seem a good thing to use for my entry into longer fiction at that time in my career, though. Later on I felt sufficiently competent to try other sorts of stories and I did.

**Q:** Why should myth be so easy for you? The writers of the most solemn classic fantasy seem to work for years to achieve that sort of thing. You seem to have been ahead of them from the beginning.

**Zelazny:** Well, I didn't discover science fiction until I was eleven years old. My mother was a little bit funny about this

sort of thing when I was very small. She didn't much approve of fairy tales for kids. She thought it made them too imaginative. So, when I began haunting libraries after I had learned to read, I discovered mythology and came to that before I found science fiction. I was fascinated by it and I continued reading mythology for a number of years. Even when I finally discovered science fiction later on, I kept up reading in the area of comparative religions and everything which involved mythology, folklore, and legend.

**Q:** What about the recognition problem? It isn't safe to assume nowadays that the public has read anything more complicated than a traffic sign. Have you ever heard from people who read *The Dream Master*, had no idea who Tristan was, and were hopelessly confused?

**Zelazny:** No, but then they're not the people who are most likely to write a letter about it. The ones you hear from are usually the ones who like something rather than the ones who detest it. One thing that I decided after I'd been writing for several weeks and had received a few dozen rejection slips, was that I had been writing down to the reader, over-explaining things, being a little too patronizing; and I determined that from then on I would go the other way. I was going to be very straightforward about it and assume that the reader knew everything I wanted him to know. And, as chance would have it, the very next story I wrote was the first one I sold. So, I've always maintained that attitude.

**Q:** I first read "He Who Shapes" when I was fifteen. This was the first time I had heard of Tristan and Isolde. I didn't read Gottfried von Strassburg until much later. So that was how I learned about them, and I appreciated it. But I don't know how typical that

was. There are a lot of people who resist that sort of thing and resent the fact that you're expecting them to know.

**Zelazny:** That's on one level. It is fine if the reader can pull out everything that the writer puts in. But I don't feel that it's absolutely necessary for purposes of enjoying the story.

**Q:** What do you think is the real power of this sort of material? A mythic fantasy can move a reader the way nothing else can. It doesn't date, and will stay around forever. Why does it appeal?

**Zelazny:** The only touchstone I really have is how the story affects me. I am counting on the fact that there is a certain trans-subjective similarity among people; and if I think of something which strikes me as a good story, I hope that I can write it in such a fashion that this same feeling will be communicated to the person reading it. I may often be dead wrong, but it is the only internal editor I possess. So I have to rely on it.

**Q:** You've also been using a modern American myth figure, of which Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe are manifestations, the hard-bitten and bitter but really caring individualist who ultimately comes up against the world. Does this character strike you as a myth in a new costume?

**Zelazny:** To tell you the truth, I never thought of that. I will have to do so, but in the meantime you may be right. [Laughs.]

**Q:** If this is not too painful a subject, would you care to tell our readers what went wrong with the movie of *Damnation Alley*, and where the killer cockroaches came from?

**Zelazny:** [Laughs.] I think part of the thing was that the book was under film option for about six years. At the time the option was originally negotiated,

something involving motorcycles would have been very big, had they gone right ahead and picked up on the option and made the film immediately. I think that might be the thing that sold it. Later though, when they finally got around to filming it, that phase of movie-making had passed; and even the drive-ins weren't showing very many, I believe. So I feel that they weren't sure what they wanted to do. I had read earlier versions of the script which I thought were pretty good. But it went through so many rewrites — and I did not see the final ones — that I think it might have been a better movie had it been made several years earlier, that's all.

**Q:** How did you feel when you actually went to see it?

**Zelazny:** Well, I felt they could have done a better job. It was not that close to my story, but I was prepared to see it changed considerably just by being transferred to the screen. Still, I was somewhat disappointed.

**Q:** I recall the story of how they filmed A. Merritt's *Seven Footprints to Satan*, and when he saw it he burst into tears. . . .

**Zelazny:** Well. . . . [Laughs.]

**Q:** . . . There was *nothing* left of it. To change the subject, what direction do you want to take with your career in the future? Are you still deliberately planning it out?

**Zelazny:** I think that I've probably done too many novels as opposed to shorter works. I've been going in heavily for them. I want to swing back and do more short things again. I enjoy short stories very much, and I just haven't been writing that many. So one thing I have on tap is to go off in that direction again. I intentionally never plan ahead too far on books now. I just like to do one book at a time. Otherwise it might start feeling like a job. Ideally, I like to

alternate between a first-person book and a third-person book. I enjoy writing in the first person, but you get stale if you do one thing exclusively.

**Q:** You mentioned before how you deliberately wrote gimmick stories until you were able to write a character story. Are there any areas into which you would like to expand your talents in the sense of deliberately training yourself to write a new kind of thing?

**Zelazny:** Well, there's something I've always wanted to do but have never gotten around to because it is more of a speculative thing: I'd like to try a play sometime. But I don't want to change my whole career in midstream. It's more something I would do for the fun of it. I do enjoy writing dialogue.

**Q:** The people I know who are in that field tell me that plays are more committee work than movies. The writer can rewrite the thing for years; and they treat it as a first draft, rewriting it again to the actors' abilities or lack thereof.

**Zelazny:** Yeah. That is one of the other things which has kept me from fooling around with it. If I wrote a play, the satisfaction I would get out of it would be basically seeing the thing down on paper in a form I considered acceptable. Maybe I'm a closet dramatist. I would like to see something produced the way I did it; but this is not tremendously high on my list, not something I'm going to sit down within the next six months and do. It's just something I will eventually try for kicks.

**Q:** How about a first-person, hard-boiled-detective novel? You seem to be getting closer to that all the time.

**Zelazny:** There is always the possibility. I don't have anything like it in the works right now, but I wouldn't rule it out.

**Q:** How much do you pay attention to

what people are saying about your writing? You'll recall about 1972 or so someone said Zelazny's lost it; he's put all the magic tricks back in the hat, and so on.

**Zelazny:** I don't really read critics anymore. The first few years I did and I got kind of cynical about it. Even the ones who liked or disliked me rather than the ones who were just neutral didn't really seem to agree on what they liked or disliked. I tend to look at it statistically, as if it were a big bell curve, a whole spectrum of critical opinion which eventually balances out. So I just stopped reading them, unless somebody comes up and hands me a review and says, "What do you think of that?" It's just not that important to me.

**Q:** Were you at all affected when they used to say, "Well, this would be fine from somebody else, but it's not as good as what he was doing a couple years ago"?

**Zelazny:** I remember that sort of thing. I don't know. After you've heard it more than once and you realize it's being applied to different things, it loses its force. You write, say, a mythical story and people say, "This is terrible. All he's doing is retelling an old myth." And when you stop doing it they say, "This new stuff is terrible. Why did he abandon those fine myth-type stories?" So I don't pay any attention to them now.

**Q:** Well, we're almost at the end of the interview, and I've got a question I've been saving. I recall that about eight years ago, in a letter to me, you mentioned that you wrote *Creatures of Light and Darkness* to see if you could write a novel in which you had no stake in any of the characters. The question is, why would you want to write a novel like that?

**Zelazny:** Why not? It was another

experiment. That book was more or less a hobby book. I didn't have any particular ambitions for it. I didn't even think anyone would buy it. It was something I wrote just to try out different things as a kind of learning exercise. I was happy with what I learned in writing it, and I was even happier when someone bought it.

**Q:** What do you think you learned from it?

**Zelazny:** For one thing, that I could handle, at least to my own satisfaction, an alienation effect. I wanted to see what I could do with a great number of

very short chapters, jumping back and forth in a kind of mosaic. I thought it would be nice to produce a long piece of work which combined novel techniques and poetry, and wound up as closet drama. I wanted to throw in both mythological materials and non-myth materials. Just things like that. I also wanted to have a fairly large number of characters. I wanted to play some games in the sense of that time duel. Things like that. Hopefully transferable techniques. Who knows?

**Q:** Thank you, Mr. Zelazny.



## SF CLICHÉS I: GALACTIC EMPIRES

One would not think that Empire could survive  
As starships Roman cavalry displace;  
The politics of Space must needs derive  
From Einstein's time, Planck's heat, and Riemann's space.  
But "History repeats," some (heedless) say,  
Analogies persist, however crude,  
And democratic notions all give way  
To fealty and service, fief and feud.  
The Empire will not die, as mortals must,  
The purple of their robes is colorfast;  
Their golden age untouched by moth or rust,  
And liberties, it seems, cannot outlast  
The paper image of a narrow Rome  
Bestrode by cardboard Caesars dressed in chrome.

— John M. Ford



# LINEHAN ALONE

by Kevin O'Donnell, Jr.  
art: George Barr



*Mr. O'Donnell tells us (rather excitedly) that this is the first short story he's completed on his brand-new word-processor (what kind, he doesn't say), and the first short story he's completed in a year and a half. The author was also the publisher of Empire, a magazine for the SF writer (and would-be writer as well).*

Dazed, hot and sticky, butt-sore from the compazine injection, Mike Linehan walked up Congress Avenue. Dangerous, perhaps, but why not? The chemotherapy was not succeeding. The doctors had just said so. The tumor behind his right temple, the constant presence in his skull that he could practically hear growing, had resisted treatment. Put quite simply, it would not die till he did. So, if a mugger pounced with a gun or a knife, well, better quick death than slow torture. At least that's what he told himself.

Still, as he passed The Big Basque's place, he stepped warily. The other janitors at the hospital claimed that New Haven's drug trade centered around that renovated three-story Victorian house. Linehan believed them. That hard, suspicious type mowing the lawn was no more a gardener than he. A lookout, more likely. And while it was one thing to take chances, it was quite another to be stupid.

Chemicals liquid fire in his veins, he — a turtle materialized before him, and it stood six feet tall.

He had no time for astonishment. A cry: **Help!** tore high and loud through his brain.

Gasping, he dropped in stunned genuflection. Pulverized concrete grated his knee as he clasped his hands over his head. His eyeballs hurt bad, as though a firecracker had just exploded behind them.

A car drew up to the curb, further blurring his vision with its shiny black length. Its chrome-trimmed, gas-guzzling sleekness pronounced to the neighborhood The Big Basque's trade and taste. Doors chunked softly, solidly; gravel crunched beneath fancy Italian shoes.

The small noises fell on Linehan like hammer blows. He tried to catch his breath. He had to get moving again. He knelt on Congress, and on Congress, they kicked you when you were down.

"Get Bandit's turtles, Henry." The deep voice, rich and self-assured, matched the car perfectly. "That ol' raccoon must be pretty hungry by now. Never seen anything eat turtles like Bandit."

**Help!**

A billion lights flashed behind his eyes; a compression wave splashed his brain against the inside of his skull. He groaned and held his stomach. *Oh Jesus God, this never happened before.* The compazine they gave him for nausea nerved him up and gave him double vision, while the chemo sometimes twisted his olfactory sense so that his body smelled like a car battery and the scent of orange juice made him sick, but never had he heard voices or seen giant turtles.

The hot breeze brought him a whiff of English Leather; he held his stomach. A foot tapped his shin just hard enough to sting. "What's the matter with you, boy?"

Over him loomed the broad strong features of a middle-aged man. The Big Basque had dark skin, a wide nose that bent in the middle to shift

directions, and brown eyes that appraised Linehan with a glance and then dismissed him. Even the nice parts of town knew he sold more drugs than anybody north of New York; rumor had it he owned some cops and probably a judge, too. As well as a gun for holster under his left arm, if that bulge in his custom-cut blue suit meant what Linehan thought it did.

"I'm waiting for an answer," said The Big Basque.

Linehan swallowed hard. The man frightened him as the obscenity sharing his skull did not. "My head — " It was hard to speak. Not only did the sound of his own voice hurt, but the screams had disoriented him. He had to assemble the sentence bit-by-bit, like a Tinkertoy, first scrounging through a jumble of unconnected thoughts and then groping around for the right word to link them. " — oh God it hurts."

"Next time don't party so hard, boy." The Big Basque laughed without humor or good will. "And this time, remember don't puke on my sidewalk, because if you do, you will lick up every drop of it before you leave. Now get on with you."

"Not — " A shiver swept through him; he hugged himself. " — I don't — party . . . gotta tumor — " He touched his right temple. " — and I just got out of chemo and — "

The huge turtle appeared behind The Big Basque. Twitching, it snapped at a low-hanging maple branch. Strong green jaws sliced through the bough without harming it. The turtle shrieked **HELP!**

A fireworks warehouse detonated between his ears; he had time to say, "Oh, Jesus Ch — " before he passed out.

He awoke on the back seat of The Big Basque's Cadillac, a pillow under his head. The limo was air-conditioned to about 60°, which made him feel marginally better. He moved his head over the crushed velvet upholstery and moaned.

"Hey, boy."

He opened his eyes; the driver put the Caddy in gear and rolled it down the potholed street. His stomach threatened revolt as buildings bounced past the window. He squeezed his eyelids tightly shut.

The Big Basque touched Linehan's knee. "You okay?"

"Ah . . . sort of." The car stopped; he risked another look. Luxuriant midnight blue fabric covered the entire interior of the Caddy.

The Big Basque was leaning over the back of the front seat, watching him with concern on his face. "We can take you to the Emergency Room, or we can take you home. You got a preference?"

"Home," said Linehan tentatively, wondering what was going on, "if it's not too much trouble."

"No trouble, boy, not for somebody in your condition. Where do you live?"

"Whalley Avenue, near Sherman. Those apartments there?" Already

warm, shaky, and hurting from the chemotherapy, he now had to contend with the added queasiness of fear. It unnerved him to have a drug dealer pay such attention to him. "By the paint store?"

"Yeah, I know 'em." He spoke briefly, quietly, to the driver; the Caddy swung left at the next intersection. Then he looked back at Linehan. "What the Hell are you doing walking around on a day like today? Oughta be home, resting up, fighting that thing in your head."

"I had to get my shot." He felt better for the short rest and the cool, clean air — or at least better enough to see the irony: the medicine to help his body had, apparently, damaged his mind. *Giant turtles, jee-zus!*

"Yeah, I know about shots, boy." His tone was oddly gentle. "My brother caught himself a tumor; just by looking at him you could tell how long it was since his last shot. Sick as a dog, he'd got it the last couple days; pale and steady but his hair falling out, last couple weeks; healthy and happy with new fuzz just coming in up top, time for the next . . ." He steadied himself as the car made another left turn. "So why didn't you take a taxi?"

Linehan supposed that anyone who would put crushed velvet on the inside roof of his car would wonder that. "I felt like walking."

"You crazy? And they let you?"

"They know me, I work there, I'm a janitor at Yale-New Haven Hospital, and, uh, look. They just told me today that the therapy's not working. I'm going to die. That's all there is to it. I walked out of there in a daze and, I guess they understood I had to. I mean, they're my friends."

"You quit on your way out?"

"Uh-uh."

"Why the Hell not? You're not making any kind of money pushing a broom, that's for sure."

"Quit and do what? Sit around and watch TV all day? Uh-uh. I'd go nuts."

The Big Basque grinned. "Don't you worry about that. Any white boy who gets a chemo shot for a head tumor and then *walks* home, up Congress Avenue, in the hottest weather we have had in New Haven in eighteen years, now that boy is already nuts."

The Cadillac eased into a right-hand turn and slipped past the huddled brick buildings of St. Raphael's Hospital. A little further on, work crews converted an abandoned synagogue into a medical office building.

Slowly, Linehan pushed himself into a sitting position. On the floor by his feet sat a brown paper bag; a vaguely fishy aroma clung to it. His stomach cramped tighter. It always did. It was the other reason he usually tried to walk home. Compazine helped, but not enough. Vomiting in a stranger's front yard is embarrassing, but less so than soiling a cab or bus.

"You're going to lose your lunch all week, aren't you?"

"Uh-huh." His face felt cold; beads of sweat slipped down his cheek.

Any minute now —

**Ease**, said the turtle, and for a moment surprise replaced discomfort. **Ease**. At least this hallucination was only aural, which was probably an improvement. Maybe.

"Listen boy, what you need is some reefer. You smoke some of it when you get to feeling nauseated. Guarantee you, you'll feel better."

"Uh . . ."

The Big Basque's eyebrows lifted. "You don't trust my advice?"

"Oh, no, it's just —"

**Help, please, help**, cried the turtle softly.

Linchan wobbled, almost knocking his head against the window. Whatever was happening seemed more real with every recurrence. The Big Basque looked alarmed. "You okay, there?"

"Just a dizzy spell, I . . . I get them now and then . . ." He began to brace himself. A *turtle* — real or imaginary, it made no difference — had spoken to him five or six times now. Surely it would —

**Please take, please save.**

With an effort, he controlled himself, limiting his reactions to a whimper and a slight widening of the eyes. Before The Big Basque could comment, he said, "It sort of *waves*, you know, *pulses* — next couple of days I'll just lie in bed and wait for it all to calm down . . . look, I'm really very grateful for the ride and for the — for the advice." He bit his lip. The odds were that the chemicals had warped his mind as they did his senses, but he was not sure. He had to find out. He could deal with visions if he knew they were visions — but there was only one way he could know for sure. "I wonder, though, could I ask you just one more favor?"

The black man's face closed up. "I am not a money-lender, boy."

He shook his head once — it was once too often. "I meant . . . see, it's real lonely when you're lying there sick as a dog. You're too sick to bother about anything, but you just feel so goddam *alone* . . . what I was wondering, I heard you say something about turtles before, and I figure this is them in this bag here, and I was wondering could I have one as a pet? Sort of to ease the loneliness?"

"You are crazy." But he grinned. The car stopped by the Exxon station at Sherman and Whalley. "This is where you get out, right?"

"This is it —"

**Please take! Please save!**

"You need a hand to your room?"

"No, I'll be okay."

"Say you found the bag?"

"Uh-huh."

"Got five turtles in there — take one."

"Thanks." He opened the paper grocery sack and looked inside. Each looked exactly like the image that filled his eyes whenever the voice

chimed in his head. If this was real, and not a madness brought on by cancer or chemicals, one of them had to be speaking to him. Unfortunately, each also looked exactly like all the others. *Jesus, which one are you?*

**Youselves will take? Youselves will save?**

*Which one are you?*

"You getting dizzy again, boy, or you just having trouble making up your mind?"

He mustered a shy smile. "A little of both." And reached inside the bag, hoping that if one of them was talking to him, whichever one it was would crawl into his hand.

Clawed feet clutched at his wrist. **Ah thank, ah thank, ah thank.**

He held it up to The Big Basque's inspection. It weighed about two pounds. "I'll take this one. Thanks a lot — for everything."

The man waved away his gratitude. "I do one good deed a day, boy — just one — and you're it for today. Be seeing you." He nodded to the driver, who pressed a button.

The door at Linehan's right clicked and swung open. Hot humid air gushed in. "Okay. Be seeing you." Careful neither to bump his head nor to move too fast, he got out. The door snapped shut before he could touch it. The Caddy purred softly and carried The Big Basque away.

Sitting at his kitchen table, he stared at the turtle. Whatever was going on, he was not hallucinating. The thing had babbled to him all the way up the stairs, using English no less comprehensible than most of Linehan's neighbors spoke, except for its insistence on referring to him in the plural. Now, clutching a pencil lead between one claw and a tiny, opposable thumb, it drew a star chart on the back of a Wheaties box. "What the hell are you?" asked Linehan.

**Incompetent.** The word tolled with deep, slow melancholy. **Observed, captured, abducted . . . I will be lanced in the egg till my carapaces grow too heavy to move, much less to mate, and then will I starve for lack of young lothers to feed and to clean . . . Incompetent.**

"Look, if you're hungry — "

**lothers cry out as the creature advances.**

The kitchen shimmered and the ten-foot tall raccoon ambled over to Linehan, licking its lips while its sharp ears twitched back and forth. He had lurched out of his chair and fumbled for a steak knife before he noticed the oven through the whiskered muzzle — the beast was some sort of projection. Not at all real, not at all dangerous.

It rocked back on its haunches, reached out one huge paw and then another, both of which seemed to grab something a few feet on either side of his shoulders, and then, opening its mouth, it swung one paw from right to left and —

Pain flashed and stabbed.

The raccoon disappeared.

**Iother Five dies. Suck skills. Realign.**

A tornado twisted to life. Its bitter winds slapped him with photos of a double sun and with the stink of an overcrowded ship; the ten of him wiggled toward the rest of himself through the warm sands of the hatcheries and paddled forth against the thousand-toothed *nograj* as part of his fitness-to-serve exam; he tore down the spare air filter for the fourteenth time because it still pumped too much CO<sub>2</sub> in the cabin, and — and he blinked. The tornado died.

He blinked again as understanding came. Iother Five had just broadcast every datum engraved on its tiny brain, and Linehan had somehow recorded them. He knew much, now — though hardly enough.

Crawling around the formica top of his kitchen table was one member of a — a hive mind, he guessed you would have to call it. The hive's joint intelligence depended on the number of bodies participating in the network. But the whole hive had not come, only part. The rest of the "group" was back home, which was . . . well, Iother Five had been a mechanic, not a navigator; and it had had no idea where the home planet actually was. What Iother Five had known was that its group had sunk every pearl — pearl? — okay, every pearl it had into this expedition, and if the subgroup failed to return with the ship, the group would be reduced to penury and offal-eating and its eggs would be destroyed in the incubators until the group earned enough pearls to pay the hatching fees and . . .

*Oh my god.* Acutely unhappy, Iother Five racked his beamer by the airlock. Madness, to venture into this hostile alien world unarmed — look at how swiftly that big-beaked white bird had torn Iother Six's head off — yes, granted the ship was now programmed to defend against things that flew as well as against things that swam, but still . . . yes, yes, the law prohibiting the bearing of death-instruments at a funeral, but the law was written for home, not for here . . . grumbling, he helped Iother One booby-trap the ship. Another damn law. When all crew members disembark, lock the ship up tight, in and out, and prime the pile to blow if anyone tampers with the drive.

One of these days, thought Iother Five, a crew member was going to screw up the re-entry procedures, and wouldn't that captain have fun explaining a ten-kiloton blast on an alien planet?

"Ah . . ." Linehan looked at Iother Two there on his table. Head extended on a scrawny green neck tinged delicately with purple, it returned his stare unblinkingly. "I guess you'd sort of like to get your ship back."

**Yes. And all Iothers. Quickly. Before —**

"Don't say it."

\* \* \*

Borrowing a car was surprisingly easy; the hard part was driving it. Halfway to Beaver Pond Park, his vision clouded over and he braked just in time to avoid a kid dribbling a basketball across the street. At the thought of what he had almost done, his stomach knotted; kneading it, he fought to keep from throwing up on the steering wheel. The alien sat on the dashboard, scanning the road and the oncoming traffic.

**Very near**, it said as he pulled into the park.

Linehan stopped the car and got out, holding the alien gingerly with both hands. "How far?"

**Close.**

He began to stroll around the pond, taking care not to slip on the muck. The water level had dropped considerably, stranding reeds to dry and die ten feet up the shore.

**There.** It pointed one claw at a half-rotted log on the water line.

"You sure?"

It made a mental noise of disgust.

"Just asking . . ." He carried it over and set it down on the mud. "Go to it."

It burrowed beneath the log and disappeared. He waited. After a minute or two of squatting he began to feel foolish. The pond smelled foul. The sun heated his skull; he hoped it made his unwanted tenant uncomfortable. Humidity clogged his lungs. He would give it another minute —

The ground trembled. A ball of mud about four feet in diameter rose up before him, tossing the log into the pond with a splash. A high whine filled his ears; in the distance, a dog howled. The ball shook. The mud flaked off, revealing a gleaming silver sphere.

**Ah thank, ah thank, ah thank.**

"You're welcome. But don't you think you're just a bit conspicuous?"

**Now we save Iothers.**

"What do you mean 'we,' paleface?"

**NOW WE SAVE IOTHERS!**

His skull rang like a bell. "Jesus, God, don't do that to me again." He fell to all fours in the muck and, abruptly, vomited. "Please don't do it again."

**Isself save. Youselves guide.**

"I guide."

First, putting his hand behind the ship and pushing gently, he guided it to the car, looking nervously about himself as he walked. Thank God no picnickers were hanging around.

He opened the door. "Get in."

It bumped its fuselage against the frame. "Let's try the trunk." The hinges creaked as the sphere strained to slip into the rear of the hatchback, but it would not fit. Period. No amount of adjusting the seats or opening



the hatch or anything was going to get a four-foot high silver beach ball inside. "May I suggest something?"

**Suggest.**

"You must have a telescope. Why don't you go way up in the air, so high nobody can see you from down here, and just follow this car? When I stop and get out, I'll point to the house where Iothers are — "

**You have outside others? Isself only senses two.**

"Huh? No, there's only — I see, grammar. I'll point to the house where youothers are, and then you can go in and save them. All right?"

**Yes.** It bobbed once, then shot straight toward the sky, dwindling into a tiny silver dot nearly invisible from the ground, though it would probably spook the Hell out of passing Cessnas . . .

Wearily, he climbed back into the car and set off. It was a ten-minute drive to the The Big Basque's house, at best, but it seemed vastly longer because halfway there a ten-foot raccoon materialized outside his windshield and began to play with something that was about the same size as the Duster and in approximately the same location. For five minutes it toyed with what had to be one of the Iothers, while Linehan shook at the wheel and tried to see oncoming traffic through the raccoon's hazy fur. Just as he was pulling in to the curb behind the Cadillac limousine, the strong paw swung.

**Iother Three dies. Suck skills. Realign.**

Iother Three's legacy poured in even as he was climbing out of the car and pointing across its roof to the front door of The Big Basque's house. A face appeared at a second floor window, the dark narrow face of the erstwhile gardener; it whirled away while a metal viewslot in the front door slid aside with a loud click. Linehan trembled. His behavior, he realized suddenly, was open to serious misinterpretation. Major drug dealers do not appreciate people who seem to signal the start of a raid.

A minute went by, and another. Cars whizzed past; a small crowd began to gather on the sidewalk behind him. Someone called, "What's you' problem, boy? You got some kind of death wish or something?"

Iother Three's databurst began to sort itself out even as a hole appeared in the roof of the house before him. He gasped. Something round and silvery darted into the hole so quickly that it barely registered. A chill ran through him. Iother Three seemed to have specialized in security. Tight security. Very tight:

**Isself must not be seen.**

**If Isself is seen, Isself must mimic native life.**

**Isself must not reveal origins.**

**Native nonselves must not know.**

**Native nonselves who know must die.**

A hand seized his shoulder and spun him around, slamming him into the side of the car. His kidneys ached. The Big Basque glared at him.

"What the hell you doing, boy? I thought —"

"Run," he said. "Don't be near me. In about ninety seconds your house is going to blow up. Then they'll come kill me. I'm sorry. If I had known —"

Gunfire rattled inside. The first floor window blew out in a gush of black smoke asparkle with flying glass.

The Big Basque lifted his gaze and glared at the front door. "You bastard," he hissed. "You muhfuhng bassard!" He raised his right hand high and chopped down hard, stunning Linehan badly. Then he ran for his house, pulling his gun from his holster as he moved.

Dazed, Linehan stumbled after him. "No! Don't!" He reached the sidewalk and staggered up the front walk. "Please, don't! Plea—"

Silver streaked vertically toward the sun. The house *bulged* — then burst in a fountain of brick and smoke and flame and flesh . . . time slowed to an incredible crawl so that he moved as if through molasses. A chair leg tumbled through the air toward him. The borrowed car roared into flame. The voice said **Where are you?** and before he could squelch it the one goddam unwelcome part of his mind that was with him and of him but NOT him said *Here* and the voice said **Ah thank, ah sorry, ah laws! Goodbye.** The chair leg swelled in his vision; it was going to miss by six inches so he would not die from that, he would not; he would live until — the silver sphere dipped back down.

*Here!* said a voice from within his own head, *Here I am, here!* and though he snarled, *Shut up, you wanna get us both killed?* the obliging tumor insisted on giving them a beacon to home in on; but there was a chance, a faint one. If he could silence the beacon — he stretched sideways, craning his neck to make the angles right while a beam of furious alien light shot down at him and the chair leg spinning touched his —


The cop held his hand while squads of ambulance attendants carried off stretcher after stretcher. "You're a lucky sonovabitch," said the cop. "We got six dead and eleven seriously injured; all you got's a knock on the noggin and a tiny little burn on the temple. Be cool, man, you'll be okay. Really, you're lucky." He gestured first to the collapsed house, where flames still flickered among the rubble, and then to the blackened carcass of the car Linehan had borrowed. "Craziest luck I ever saw. You were right between both explosions. You must have cat blood or something. You made it through that, you can make it awhile longer, so just be cool. A night in the hospital and you'll be fine."

He wanted to say that no number of nights in the hospital would help him; that in fact the more nights he spent there the worse he felt, but instead he closed his eyes. For a moment he listened.

Nothing. Silence. He was alone in his skull again.

Perhaps totally alone?

He relaxed. Maybe the cop was right after all. These days, it seemed like anything could happen.

If it did, of course, he would have to let the doctors take the credit. 

## CENTENNIAL TANKAS

The Brooklyn Bridge is

100 years old tonight

Let's raise our glasses

And praise it as we would wish

To be praised if we'd raised it

It mirrors the size

We grew to, who went through this

Century with it

Aorta and pulsing vein

Of Success's golden heart

Prophet of profits

Grandstand of suicides, theme

Of all boozy bards

Wonder of the Average Man

Pyramids blink at its span

And churches shudder

They can see above its towers

Cities in the stars

— Tom Disch

May 24, 1983

# THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT y

by Grendel Briarton

art: Tim Kirk



*Mr. Briarton is still at work on his How to Cook Starlings, which we trust will eventually be in every kitchen, especially if it can obtain the nihil obstat of the Surgeon General of the U.S. (We think, actually, that blackbirds would make a prettier dish. . . .)*

Ferdinand Feghoot incurred the enmity of Dr. Gropius Volkswagen, then President of the Society for the Aesthetic Rearrangement of History, when that elderly scholar presented his monumental paper on "Saving the World by Removing the Internal Combustion Engine from the Twentieth Century."

He listened politely until comments were called for. Then he addressed himself to the podium.

"My dear Doctor," he said, "while I appreciate the depth of your learning and your mountains of data, I must take issue with a few of your points."

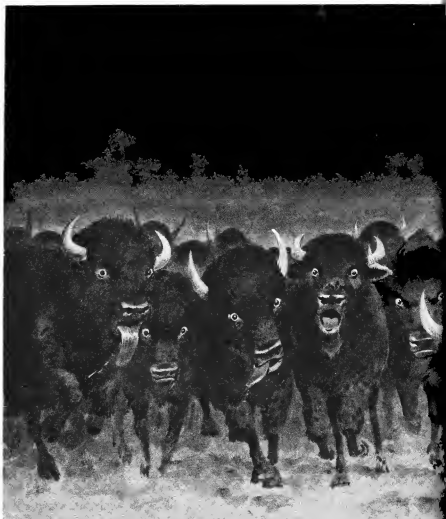
Dr. Volkswagen sneered.

"The Datsun was not, as you've stated, 'a long German dog with short legs used to hunt badgers.' Nor did the Audubon Society conduct high-speed races on Germany's freeways. Finally, the novel *Vespers in Vienna* was not concerned with the Austrian importation of Italian motor-scooters."

Dr. Volkswagen's face grew redder and redder. "SO!" he exploded. "By quibbling you think you make a monkey out of Gropius Volkswagen, Ph.D., Ph.D., Ph.D.? I am *right*. If we do not the filthy internal combustion engine remove, it is the end of the world!"

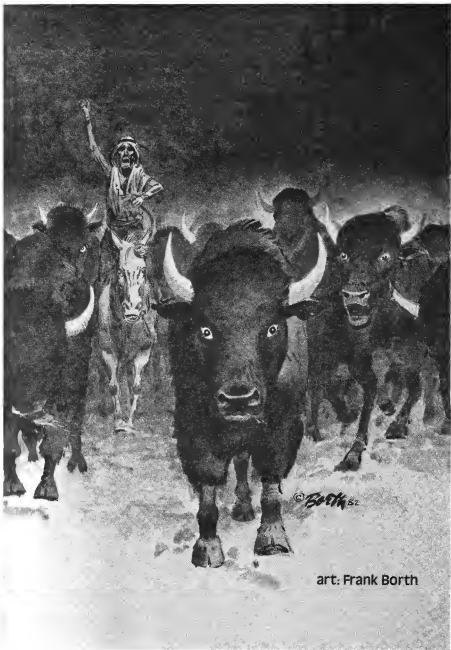
"That would be a shame!" said Ferdinand Feghoot. "To end not with a bang, not with a whimper, but just with a Saab."





# SHAGGY VENGEANCE

by Robert Adams



art: Frank Borth

*Robert Adams is a Florida resident, former soldier, genial host at convention parties, and author of the popular Horseclans books. He demonstrates his versatility as a writer once again with this story, which isn't at all like most of his others.*

"It was back in the late 1880s," Professor Bauer began, "that the last sizable herd of Northern Plains Bison was located along the banks of Blutig Creek, where it twisted its course through what came to be called *das Schlachthaustal*."

Peggy, my wife, seated on the couch beside me with her legs tucked under her like the graceful feline she often resembled in movement, shivered suddenly and pressed closer to my side. A gust of the storm blowing down from Canada chose that moment to strike our cozy, if rented, house with a force that rattled doors and windows and shot tiny darts of icy air in an erratic pattern through the room, like a volley of phantom arrows from the bows of long-dead Indian warriors.

"Can't we talk about something else?" she asked. "If this keeps up, I won't get a wink of sleep, and I have to teach tomorrow, too, if you'll remember."

I was in the second semester of my first year at Buffalo Mountain Agricultural College back then, and Peggy was teaching second grade at Last Herd Elementary School. While she was earning a bit less than she had back east, I was earning enough more to make up the difference and, moreover, I was doing what I wanted to do — teaching college-level English to kids who really had a desire to learn something. And after two years of attempting to teach high-school English to roomfuls of dead-end kids whose only interests were discussing the finer points of constructing zip-guns, smoking reefers in the boys' rooms and carving their initials into anything within reach — mineral, vegetable or animal — with the switchblade knives, which items were *de rigueur* for school dress in their primitive, savage sub-culture.

Each time I had forced myself to enter East Yorkville High, I had felt less like a teacher than like Clyde Beatty, with chair and whip and blank pistol, endeavoring to put wild, killer animals through the prescribed paces. Now, I was happy. I often found myself whistling something light and jolly as I drove my battered eleven-year-old Rambler the six or so miles from the outskirts of Lost Herd along the new and almost arrow-straight road to the college six miles away, even on mornings I had to follow the snowplow to get there.

Peggy, bless her, was content anywhere there were lots and lots of children, but she also was city-born-and-bred and she missed the appurtenances of big-city life — museums, theaters, ballet, symphony. But she loved me and did not complain . . . often or much.

There were comparatively few men involved in elementary or even in secondary education in those days, but such few as there were at Lost Herd School — from the courtly-mannered, stylish Principal Frederick Räbel to the strapping, likeable assistant athletic director, Rudi Keilermann — moved in a worshipful attendance upon my petite, vivacious, blonde wife. Since this sort of thing had been happening to Peggy for most of her twenty-six years, she took it all in stride, easily negotiating the tightly constricted and hazard-strewn path that such open masculine adulation set for her.

She got the same reaction from the fathers of most of her pupils, too. But, as she was really good at her chosen work — the kids liked her and she could get through to them — her relations with the other female teachers and the mothers were close and unstrained.

She had never learned to drive and, on those rare mornings when it was feasible, she pedaled her bike the eight blocks down Büffel Street to the school, but most of the time she rode in on the rickety bus on its return from the northwestern farms with its load of kids.

There were four of these ancient, rattletrap conveyances in Lost Herd — well, six actually, but the other two were no longer in working order and were being used as parts reservoirs at the behest of the tightfisted school board, its members worthy descendants of the more-than-thrifty, Germanic peasants who had settled this area eighty or so years back. I shuddered every time I saw my sweet, little Peggy climb aboard one of the automotive nightmares and watched it chug off, usually emitting backfires as loud as the reports of a 20mm Bofors and invariably trailing an opaque cloud of coal-black smoke.

My little Rambler coupe *looked* every bit as bad as a typical Lost Herd school bus, but I maintained it in its optimum condition, driving into Lost Herd at least one night in every couple of weeks to Wolff Knipsengeldt's service station, where that worthy would allow me to use his tools and lift, sell me whatever I needed at cost and even order parts he did not stock. The price of this largesse being that I give ear to his endless, often bloodcurdling anecdotes of his days as a driver for Dutch Schultz in the Chicago area of the twenties. The townsfolk had heard these tales reiterated for years and would no longer sit still for them, so the rare newcomers or the transients were Wolff's only audience.

Professor Olaf Bauer, a jovial little gnome of a man, was easily twice my age and, with his round, rosy cheeks, thick moustache and drooping meerscham hunter's pipe, more resembled one of those jolly figures found on "Souvenir of München" *bierkrugen* than he did a professor of agrology and agronomy. Through his father, he was a grandson of one of the founders of Lost Herd. He had leapt at the chance to return when the state had decided to build one of the strategically located branch colleges hereabouts, acted as sort of an unofficial liaison between the



college and the town, and had become my fast friend within weeks of my arrival.

Olaf was a widower and seldom saw his children, who were scattered about the country with families of their own now, so he took to dropping in on Peggy and me on a semi-regular, twice-weekly basis, always bringing several long, green or brown bottles of wine to accompany the dinner. He and Peggy got along fabulously, chattering happily away in German (her maiden name was von Annweiler) or, haltingly, in the Norwegian he had absorbed with his Norse mother's milk and was, at Peggy's request, teaching her.

That particular night, with the dishes stacked in the kitchen, our bellies full of hearty, Germanic fare cooked by Peggy in her superlative manner, three bottles of an incomparable Wehlener Sonnenuhr Moselle and vanilla ice cream, we had congregated before the coal grate in the small living room of our frame house, Olaf and I with our pipes and all three of us with scalding black coffee and snifters of brandy.

Mausi, the huge, rangy, grey tomcat, was apparently a fixture of the house, since he was resident on the premises when Peggy and I arrived. He had remained because he earned his keep, waging constant, no-quarter war against the horde of field mice and voles which seemed to prefer a heated house to a frozen, and usually snow-covered, prairie for their winter habitat. Mausi was also an infallible prophet of coming blizzards or deep snows. Any night he refused to go out we always could expect bad weather by morning, no matter what some glib meteorologist might declare on the radio.

As I faced him across Mausi's hearth rug, I remarked, "Olaf, how did the town ever get the name, Lost Herd. This certainly isn't ranching country and I didn't think the old trail-herds ever got this far north."

Olaf had raised his bushy eyebrows a notch. "You drive from here to the college every day, Frank; haven't you ever stopped and read that state marker-sign just beyond the first bridge where the road curves around the base of Buffalo Mountain?"

When I admitted I had not, he began the tale.

"In those days there were very few Indians hereabouts. Those who later were brought back here and settled on the Buffalo Mountain Reservation were then still living under guard in the south, Oklahoma Territory, I think. But one very old Indian lived on the mountain and sometimes came into the town, which then was called 'Freiheitburgh,' to trade a few skins and furs for tobacco, dried beans and the odd bit of hardware.

"My own *Grossvater* Bauer often saw him and was several times in Messerschmidt's store when the old Indian came in. *Grossvater* used to say that he looked as old as the mountain itself, that Indian, with snow-white hair and teeth worn almost to the gums, hands like bony claws covered with dark parchment and beady, black eyes sunk deep into the

sockets.

"Those few who could speak his language said that he called the mountain on which he lived 'The Mother of Buffalo' and claimed that the mountain had given birth to the ancestors of the buffalo, long ago, before even the Indians came here.

"*Grosswater* knew the old man's Indian name and used to tell it to me, but I confess I've forgotten it, now. The translation from whatever tongue it was into English by way of *Grosswater*'s Plattdeutsch would be something on the order of 'Guardian-Priest of the Mother of Buffalo.'

"The folks from Freiheitburgh and round about had known of the small herd in the little valley or *Tal* as long as they had been settled here, but the valley's creek was subject to annual floodings of meltwater from the mountain and was too narrow, anyway, for farming, so the bison were left alone except when one or two men rode over and shot the occasional animal for meat. But not just the meat, either, for they were frugal folks and, like the Indians, they used every part of a carcass.

"Another reason they kept close about the bison herd was that they wanted no part of professional buffalo hunters, not around their town and farms and womenfolk.

"Buffalo hunters have often been glamorized, but there was nothing glamorous about the real article. They were a class made up of the utter dregs of frontier society — brutal, vicious, filthy men. They seldom washed, wore clothes until they rotted off, and carried with them everywhere the stench of blood and death.

"Indians killed them on sight, peaceable towns that wanted to stay that way hired mankillers to keep the buffalo hunters and similar riffraff out; only the Army tolerated these pariahs, and then only because their extermination of the bison was helping the Army by eliminating the natural larder of the Plains Tribes.

"Well, all through the seventies and early eighties while the bison fell in their millions under the big-bore rifles of the hunters, who took only the hides and sometimes the tongues, leaving billions of tons of meat to rot, the small herd thrived in its little valley, showing little proclivity to stray far from the mountain, and not threatening crops enough to warrant exterminating it.

"By the late eighties, the buffalo hunters' grisly time was over; they had done their chosen work too well and too completely. The Plains Bison was considered extinct by the scholars of that time, and the species very narrowly missed that classification.

"Such few hunters as were still in the field spent more time gathering wagonloads of buffalo bones and carting them to the railheads than they did shooting their rifles.

"Therefore, when a big-mouthed railroad employee who had been served a fresh bison steak in the town of Freiheitburgh mentioned the

fact, the hunters converged on this area like buzzards to a dead horse."

"But," I interjected, "hadn't any of them passed through here earlier? I thought they scoured the territories after the larger herds were slaughtered."

Olaf shrugged and took a sip of his brandy. "I suppose those who passed nearby thought that, as the land was mostly farms, the bison had all been killed off by the farmers. But when they heard the truth, dozens came — by rail, by horse, by wagon and Red River cart. They didn't waste much time in the town, but headed straight for Buffalo Mountain.

"None of the folks hereabouts liked thinking of what was going to happen to the bison, but they were hard-working, peace-loving people and they didn't consider the shooting of a few score wild beasts sufficient reason to rile the hair-trigger tempers of a group of fifty or sixty rough, cruel men. The town marshal, Horst Zeuge, gave notice that he and his three regular deputies would protect the town, but that anybody who went out to the hunters' camp was on his own.

"The first night after most of the hunters arrived, they set up camp, brought whiskey and started a drinking bout that ended in a pitched battle between three or four different groups of them. The next morning, the survivors were too hung over to do any shooting so they just scouted out the herd. They boozed the second night, too, and somehow the wagon containing most of the ammunition for the big rifles caught fire and burned to the axles.

"Three of the leaders took what money hadn't been spent on whiskey into town and bought out Messerschmidt's small stock of heavy caliber ammunition, placing orders for more as soon as the railroad could get it up to Freiheitburgh.

"*Grossvater* said that from noon until it was too dark to see, all the town could hear the booming cracks of the big rifles. There were not many shots though the next day, for most of the ammunition was by then gone and the hunters had no more money to buy the lead and powder and primers they would have needed to make more cartridges.

"When the three hunter leaders finally came into town on the day the train was due with their ordered ammunition, they brought two wagons piled high with scraped, green hides and a cart with two barrels of fresh tongues. Old Messerschmidt got all three loads, giving the hunters what value they didn't get in ammunition in whiskey.

"*Grossvater* was then one of the town marshal's regular deputies and he berated Messerschmidt for selling more whiskey to the hunters, but the old merchant said that if they should get drunk and kill a few more of each other, why then that would be that many fewer for the federal marshal the town had sent for after the first shootout to handle.

"After the hunters had left for their camp with the new stocks of ammunition, one of the earliest settlers, who could speak the Indian

language, came to the marshall's office, and with him was the old Indian. Through the translator, Guardian-Priest of the Mother of Buffalo implored Marshall Zeuge to stop the strangers from killing more bison, but Zeuge gave the same answer he had given to the white folks. Then he advised the old man to go up on his mountain and stay there until the territorial marshall came and brought things back to normal.

"*Grosswater* was there that afternoon, and he said that Guardian-Priest just stood and stared at the marshall and the rest of them for two or three minutes; then he started to speak . . . in good German.

" "The Mother of Buffalo has been good to you who have come from a far land, as she was good to those who lived in this land before you, as she was good to the ones who preceded them. Her children's bodies have given you sustenance, warm hides, horn and bone and sinew for your tools, chips for your fires. Nor have the Mother's children gone forth from their valley to eat or despoil your maize or the strange grasses you grow for the tiny seeds.

" "Yet now you see strangers come to kill all The Mother's children, not for food and tools, but only for hides and the evil joy of killing for the sake of killing. The Mother has given of her children to help you in your times of need. In this, her time of need, you turn away your faces from her.

" "I am a very old man. I have done and will do all that one old man can do to protect The Mother's children, while you many and far younger men will do nothing.

" "But be warned: The Mother will neither forget nor forgive your perfidy. As her children are dying in their little valley, so too will the get of your loins die there, one day. Skinless and tongueless and dead will your children lie in that valley, even as The Mother's children now lie there.' "

Olaf had emptied his pipe of ashes and now he began to stuff it afresh with the dark mixture from his old, cracked pouch.

Peggy gulped half her brandy and shivered. "I thought you weren't going to tell ghost stories tonight, Olaf? You lied to me."

The old man eyed her from beneath his shaggy brows. "I lied to you, *liebchen*? I did not lie to you. I have told nothing but the truth as it was told to me, and my *Grosswater* was known all his life as a truthful man, not given to exaggeration or embroidery."

Peggy shivered yet again. "But that curse, Olaf, that poor Indian's curse, I'm all gooseflesh from it."

Olaf chuckled. "Now, *liebchen*, you know how and why voodoo works against primitives and not, usually, against civilized people. It is necessary to believe in curses, to be superstitious. You are clearly superstitious.

"So, too, were my ancestors, but only in a European variety of superstition, so the old Indian's curse had no effect upon them, as it certainly would have upon other Indians."

Peggy shook her tiny head, gripping the snifter so tightly that her knuckles shone white and I was sure that any minute the stem would snap off or the globe break.

"No, Olaf, the curse was not directed at them, but at their children and grandchildren, at all those children who descended from them."

Olaf finished stuffing his huge pipe, struck a match and went through the meticulous routine of lighting it before he answered.

"Well, if so, the curse has had no effect to date, not one that I know of, anyway."

I still wanted to hear the conclusion of the story, so I said, "Did they kill the rest of the herd the next day?"

He shook his head. "No, what with the whiskey, they had another drinking bout and, instead of shooting the next day, they moved their camp further from town, into the valley itself, which was a fatal mistake, as it turned out. With the marshall's warning and all, nobody rode out there until the territorial marshall came in on the train with a platoon of the Tenth Cavalry. He and Zeuge and *Grossvater* rode out with the soldiers, but there were no hunters to arrest.

"Somehow or other, they'd managed to stampede the herd, what was left of it. The bison had apparently run right over the camp in the middle of the night, since most of the bodies found were still rolled in their blankets. That camp was a gruesome sight, *Grossvater* averred.

"The only survivor was found a couple of days later by a farmer. He wasn't quite right in the head and didn't live long, but the story he told was that the first night in the new camp, they had caught an old Indian skulking about. The hunters hated Indians as much as Indians hated them. They skinned him alive before they finally killed him.

"That night the bison came. As I said, the one survivor was mentally unbalanced by it all. He repeatedly swore that the herd that struck the camp was led by an Indian on a pony, but of course no one believed him.

"But the strangest thing of all is that no one ever saw the herd after that, to this very day. Soldiers and settlers rode up and down that valley and all over the mountain, but never found even a fresh buffalo chip. The federal marshall, who had been a plainsman in his youth, was of the opinion that the herd, after it overran the camp, kept going north and passed on into Canada. *Grossvater* agreed with him.

"During the First World War, when things and people were suspect if German, it was decided to change the name of Freiheitburgh and the name finally decided upon was Lost Herd. It is as simple as that, my good, young friends."

Peggy, with her prescience, must have known of the horror that was coming, for she awakened me that night and many another for several weeks with her nightmare-spawned screams. I must confess that I, too, felt a little prickle up the back of my neck each time I drove past Buffalo

Mountain, after that, or crossed the fine, new concrete bridge over Blutig Creek, but being a sane, well-educated man, I rationalized it to the point at which it no longer bothered me on a conscious level.

In early March we had a week of unseasonal warmth, followed by a howling storm and freezing rain that left everything for miles coated with ice, including the nice, new road. That was the night on which two of our college boys were coming back from a weekend visit to their families on farms just the other side of Lost Herd.

Hansi Zeuge was known to be a good, careful driver and his almost-new Triumph sportscar was equipped with chains and said to have been in perfect mechanical condition. Nonetheless, a county roadcrew found the Triumph smashed into the rail of Blutig Creek bridge around dawn of a Monday morning. The two bodies were found atop the ice of the creek, below. Hansi and Wilhelm Hüter were buried in sealed caskets, not unusual in bad smashups.

The next accident was less than a month later and at almost the same spot. There were four fatalities in the second mishap, three of them locals, one a boy from downstate. Strangely, in the wake of the second accident, a bevy of law-enforcement types descended on Lost Herd, poked and pried about the town and the area, and questioned a number of residents.

The resident MD at the college, Herman Blairig, had done his residency in New York and welcomed my occasional visits to his clinic. His cousin was county coroner and as we sat in his office one afternoon sipping tea laced with dark rum, "Frank," he said, "have you wondered why the state cops have been nosing around here?"

I nodded. "Sure, Doc, everybody has."

He glanced about the room with a conspiratorial eye, then lowered his voice. "Now don't go spreading this around. We don't want to scare folks, Frank, but they was some damn peculiar things about the four kids that was killed week before last. And the two boys before them, for that matter.

"My cousin, Doc Egon, is the main reason the cops is here. The first two, the Zeuge boy and Willi Hüter, was thrown clear through the convertible top, prob'ly parts of them went through the windshield, too, and they must've slid some way on the ice and they likely laid down there for some hours, so Egon figured what all was done to them could be explained by the accident itself or by animals getting at the bodies, 'fore they was found.

"But in this last one, Frank, it was a four-door seedan. The driver seems to of lost control right where the road starts to curve 'round the mountain. The car skidded, flipped end over end a couple of times and wound up burning in the creek. All four kids was flung out while it was

still moving. Some drummer seen the fire and all and barrelassed into town and the sheriff and rescue squad and fire company and all got there no more'n a hour after it happened.

"And that's where the funny part starts. All four of them kids was thrown into snowbanks on the sides of the road. The clothes of three of them was torn off in pieces, even their boots, the skin had been torn or abraded off all three of them and some critter had torn out their tongues. Aside from the tongues being gone, their faces and heads hadn't been touched."

As he added hot tea and dollops of rum to our cups, I asked, "You said three, what happened to the fourth one?"

He sucked at his prominent incisors for a moment, then shook his head. "Nothing, Frank, not one dang thing! It was that Garrity boy from downstate. His neck was broke clean and he had some more broken bones and accompanying contusions, but he was fully dressed. His nose had been mashed flat, his front teeth were broken off and his face generally torn up some, but he still had his tongue."

The doctor blew hard on his tea, then sipped it noisily. "Egon figgers that any animals would've got to three of them kids would've got to the others, too. So he figgers warn't a four-legged critter, that's why he called in the state on it.

"Now, Frank, don't you go tellin' all this here to your pretty, little wife and scare her half to death. But you be dang sure you lock up tight at night until they catch this lunatic."

I didn't tell Peggy any of it. Maybe I should've; she thinks so . . . now. Maybe, if I had, none of the worst part would have happened. But Hell, you can "if" and "maybe" yourself into a straightjacket and a soft room. I didn't tell her because I love her and I knew she was sensitive as all Hell and I didn't want to upset her.

Grimfaced, well-armed men tramped and drove and rode horses all over the area, working outward from Buffalo Mountain in wide spirals, but they never found much of anything. Some hoofprints in the snow down by the creek that some said were bison, but were felt to be simply strayed cattle from one of the small-scale, local dairy-beef operations.

I did buy a pistol — an elderly Colt Peacemaker with a four-inch barrel, which I loaded with five of the huge cartridges and hid in the glove compartment of the car, so as not to alarm Peggy, who was terrified of firearms of any description.

Spring came in without any more deaths and the community settled down into its usual pursuits. Olaf began to drive over for the twice-weekly dinners again; I recommenced my evenings at Wolff Knipsengeldt's automotive infirmary.

At the college, the faculty and students returned from spring break to stare in wonder at the five bison which had, after knocking down some

yards of fencing, joined the dairy herd in its pasture. They all were young, healthy animals — two heifers and three immature bulls. The Canadian Government was known to maintain a herd of bison in the province just north of us, and the initial supposition was that these were strays from that herd.

When I told Peggy about the bison she was thrilled and, two nights later at the first of our dinners since the break, she and Olaf cooked up the idea for a couple of bus loads of the children from Lost Herd Elementary coming out to see these first bison to reappear in these parts since the 1880s.

I had misgivings about the whole affair, principally because I feared that if those decrepit busses tried to maintain any speed in excess of twenty-five miles per hour for some six whole miles, they would rapidly disintegrate right there on the highway, held together as all four were with rust, peeling paint, rubberbands, masking tape and prayer.

The outing was cleared with the school board and set for a Thursday afternoon. It was decided that the second and third grades would go: Peggy's class and the one taught by a Miss Irunn Gustafsson, who was also a school bus driver. The forty-odd children were to go in two busses — apparently the board members had no more faith in their four automotive abortions than did I.

On the Wednesday evening before that hellish day, I had driven in to Wolff Knipsengeldt's, immediately after dinner. He had sent word that that day's mail had finally brought a part we had ordered from the closest Nash-Rambler dealer, far downstate. When, at length, the old mechanic and I had finished the installation, washed up a bit and were sharing a couple of bottles of cold beer, while relaxing in the tilt-back front seats of my car, Wolff lolled his grizzled head back and reached up to ring his scarred knuckles on the horizontal section of the two-inch steel rollbar — sometime in its checkered past, my little car had apparently been used as a stockcar or a dragster, of which period the rollbar welded to the frame was the only souvenir, aside from an extremely heavy suspension.

After another pull at his beer bottle, Wolff said, "Frankly, tinny as they makes cars today, you'uz shore smart to leave this-here bar on. Ef this-here little sweetie-pie ever comes to roll 'r flip, that-there bar'll save your life, likely.

"You mark my words, Franky, the day's gonna come, and not too long a-comin' neither, whin the friggin' in-surance comp'nies or evun the Guv'mint's gonna make the folks builds cars — Ford and Chrysler and Gen'rul Motors and all — put in stuff like rollbars and steerin' wheels won't bust up your ribs, and rubber or suthin to pad the dashboards and a whole lotta stuff like thet, just like they made 'em all put in safety glass in windshields, a while back.

"Hell, prob'ly won't be long 'fore near ever car you see'll have seat-



belts, too. Standard!"

This was a new one on me. "Seat belts, Wolff? Such as airplanes use? That kind? What earthly good would they be in a car?"

Without answering me, he set his half-full bottle on the floorboards and got out of the car. I assumed he was going around to the john, but I was wrong. Presently, he returned bearing a paper-wrapped parcel. Sitting back down and holding his bottle tightly between his bony knees, he delved under the wrappings and extracted two pieces of black webbing each about two inches wide and obviously of some length, though folded upon themselves several laps and secured with thick rubber bands; each dangled metal fittings from the ends and the centers of each mounted a thick, square piece of chrome a bit wider than the webbing and bearing some automotive hallmark I could not make out in the dim interior of the Rambler.

Wolff handed one of the things to me and said, "These-here is seat-belts, Franky. Old man Zeuge got me to order 'em for to go on poor little Hansi's TR. An' you know, Hansi an' Willi seen my light — I'z workin' late on ol' Miz Heidi Wagner's '47 Hudson — an' they drove in here to get gas, thet same night they'z kilt. I tol' him then I'd done got these-here in an' I could put 'em on right then, wouldn' a took more'n twenny, thirty minits, but them poor *Burschen*, they dint wanta take the time, then. Chances are if they hadn' been in sich a all-fired hurry," he sighed, belched, and sniffed strongly, then hawked and spit out the window.

But his story had told me what I wanted to know. I could see the value of the strips of webbing. If the two boys had been belted into the sportscar, the impact would not have hurled their bodies through roof or windshield and twenty long feet down onto a hard-frozen creek. They still might have been injured, but they, most likely, would still be alive, at least.

Knowing Wolff's frugality — though he'd do almost anything for someone he considered a friend, the wag throughout *Lost Herd* was to the effect that he was capable of extracting blood from turnips and of squeezing a silver dollar until the eagle defecated — I asked, "These things must be damned expensive, Wolff, anything that goes on a sportscar is. Why haven't you sent them back for a refund?"

"*Englische Dummköpfe!*" he exclaimed, with feeling. "I tried to, Franky. You know I don't write letters too good, but I tol' thet sweet Miss Gustafsson whatall I wanted to say, one day an' she writ the purties' letter you ever did see an' done it with a typewriter, t'boot. She tol' the dealer I got these-here belts from in Ch'cago all 'bout them *Jungen* a getting kilt an' all, but it dint do no damn good.

"Them bastids, they sint 'em back to me, *postage due*, along of this-here snotty letter, said I'd bought the fuckers an' now they'uz mine! So they jest been layin' back in the office closit with a bunch of old Hupmobile an'

Maxwell parts was in there whin I bought this-here place."

To shorten a long story, when I drove back home that night, the Triumph seat belts had been installed in my car. I knew that Peggy would not like the extra expense, but I thought the added safety feature might win over her cautious nature. May God bless and keep old Wolff Knipsengeldt, wherever he may be today, for those seat belts saved our lives, Peggy's and mine.

Wednesday had been rainy and Wednesday night had been cold and drizzly with a brisk wind from the northwest making it downright chilly. But Thursday morning dawned clear and bright, with only a few high, wispy clouds drifting like cotton candy across the rich, light-blue of the sky. The air was almost balmy and filled with the promise of the prairie summer to come. There was no hint, that morning, of the cold, grim, Hell-spawned horror that would lie under that sun before the day had ended.

The busses from Lost Herd were scheduled to arrive at the college at nine that morning and I had made arrangements to be free for most of the time the kids would be on campus — not a difficult thing for me within the small, friendly, easy-going college. They were not there at nine, nor yet at ten and I was worried sick about Peggy by the time the two aged vehicles chugged and spluttered up the cursive drive, each trailing its inevitable cloud of thick, oily fumes.

Peggy and her twenty-three little second-graders were on the first bus, driven by blond, handsome Rudi Keilermann. The second automotive antique was driven by plump, red-haired Irunn Gustafsson, leading her twenty-seven third-graders in a round of *Volkslieder*.

Olaf Bauer had outdone himself in preparations for the visiting children. Since most of them were farm kids and many would eventually be students at Buffalo Mountain Ag., he had set up a Cook's tour of all of the varied facilities and some of the classes, a cafeteria lunch, with the dairy herd and bison for dessert. The delayed arrival naturally forced him to reshuffle his schedule somewhat, but the program worked out just fine, with the children all suitably impressed throughout. But, at the end, they ignored the prize cattle to ooh and ahh and bombard poor, patient Olaf with their endless questions concerning the huge, shaggy, dark-brown bovines.

Doctor Wallace Churchill, the Administrator, had wired a inquiry to the Canadians regarding our five young *bison bison* and had received a return wire to the effect that none of the small herd seemed to be AWOL but, nonetheless, had included examples of the series of numbers which would be found tattooed inside the left ear of any Canadian-type bison.

The five shaggy strangers had proven amazingly tame and cooperative — which reinforced the suppositions that they were not truly wild. But

when they were all chuted and examined, no man-made markings of any description were found.

The children were loaded aboard the busses a little after two PM, but then the third-grader bus refused to start. Two of our mechanics were hastily summoned from the college tractor garage. After extensive examinations of the grease-caked, oil-dripping engines of both busses, accompanied by exclamations and crudities that would have made even Wolff Knipsengeldt blush, the mechanics announced that, considering the abominable conditions of the engines, it was a divine miracle that either bus had even made it to the college and that the only way the one would make it off the campus would be behind a tow truck.

After some discussion, it was decided to put all the kids aboard the one operative bus, three instead of two to a seat. I offered to follow in my car and, since the bus was rather crowded, it was not difficult to persuade Peggy to ride with me. Olaf piled into the back seat; I'd already promised to drive him in to pick up his car from Wolff, who was tuning it.

With a roar and a clatter of loose parts, backfiring deafeningly and laying its usual smoke screen, the single, jam-packed bus swung around the drive and headed for the road back to Lost Herd.

Peggy had been sleeping when I had come in the night before and I had forgotten to tell her about the new seat belts earlier, so it took me a few minutes to explain to her how to fasten and tighten them. Then a student came running over to the car to bring Olaf the pipe he had left behind somewhere on the tour and to have a few words with the professor about something academic. By the time I finally got down to the highway, the bus was minuscule with distance on the straight, almost flat road.

Going a little faster than I liked to push my aging car, I took up pursuit, trying to at least close some of the lead. But young Rudi Keilermann seemed to think he was Raymond Mays, he was firewalling the bus as it started the long, looping curve around the flank of Buffalo Mountain. The mountain — all dark-green conifers and black rock outcrops — stood like a monstrous, shaggy-flanked beast in the midst of the flat or gently-rolling prairie lands and I suddenly realized how it had likely acquired its Indian name and legends: from this angle, its ridgecrest did bear a resemblance to a bison's silhouette — the glaciers of Pleistocene times had so carved it that the rounded peak took a sharp downslope on the long side and fell into a saddle on the other before rising back to another slightly lower round summit. Viewed imaginatively, this lone sentinel of the plains could easily be likened to a gigantic bison.

Nonetheless, I had closed the gap sufficiently to hear the sudden screaming of tortured rubber, followed almost immediately by a tearing, rending metallic crash!

"No! Oh, dear God, no!" screamed Peggy.

Not knowing just what lay ahead, I geared down as I rounded the

mountain and started down the long, gentle slope into Slaughterhouse Valley, toward the bridge over Bloody Creek. All that was visible of the bus from that angle was the red-rust undercarriage and the smoking, still-spinning wheels. I could hear Peggy sobbing and Olaf muttering German prayers.

Then, as I neared the bridge, up the steep bank from the bed of Bloody Creek came the bison, a dozen or more of the huge beasts, all shining, curved horns and little red-glowing eyes. Each of the ton-weight monsters seemed to span the width of the road and I knew the Rambler would fold into itself like an accordion if it hit one. Nor was I the only one who saw them, for Olaf was leaning past me, pointing his finger at the animals while he shouted something incomprehensible in my ear.

I slammed on the brakes and it seemed for a moment that I might make it safely. But then the rear end fishtailed far, far to the right and both left wheels rose up and then it all was a kaleidoscope of blue sky below and black macadam above and gut-wrenching terror for myself and for Peggy and Oh-God-take-me-if-you-must-but-please-spare-Peggy. The screams were as deafening as the grinding-tearing of rending metal and the bone-jarring, slamming thuds. And it seemed to go on forever, yet was over immediately.

I'll never know just how many times the little car rolled, but when I came to realize that I was alive, the Rambler was upright again and still on the roadway, just beyond the wrecked bus. The Rambler's hood was gone, along with the windshield, all the other windows and most of the roof . . . and poor old Olaf. I could see his grotesquely sprawled body in the middle of the road.

At first, I thought Peggy was gone, too, but she still was strapped safely beside me. As it developed, she actually had come out of it all with fewer physical injuries than had I, since the long-defective lock on her side of the seat-back had failed early-on and centrifugal force had held her prone, affording her body the added protection of the stronger sides of the car.

From far back the road, the broad, multiple skid marks showed the distance the bus had skidded before slamming over on its left side. The sliding bus had struck the strong, thick steel pole that held the state's **Slaughterhouse Valley — Lost Herd** sign at windshield level *and torn back almost the entire length* of the weak, rusty metal. The bus lay open like a discarded can of sardines and part of its contents spilled down the green, grassy slope into the old level of Slaughterhouse Valley.

And among those too-still little shapes, the bison moved. In twos and threes, the brown-and-black-nightmare monsters went from one battered small body to another, leaving in their wake . . . pure, screaming horror. The huge, primeval heads went down and when they arose, the small corpses lay stripped of both clothing and skin.

Other bison were grouped about Olaf, up the road. And then I saw a rider approaching — a white-haired, wrinkled Indian on a runty, big-headed, claybank horse. The pony-sized equine was devoid of saddle, only a faded blanket hung over his back and withers; and his "bridle" was a length of braided rawhide tied around his lower jaw. The old Indian bore no feathers or other ornaments, and his clothing was roughly-fashioned of buckskin.

Though the oldster looked as if the wind would blow him away, he dropped lightly from his mount at Olaf's now bare and skinless body. The sun glinted on the blade of the curved knife he drew from a hide sheath. He bent and grabbed something that distance denied me sight of, and his knife moved downward in a swift blur. Then he remounted and rode on toward the bus.

I must have passed out, then — I was seriously injured, although I was not then aware of the fact. But Peggy's terrified shrieks aroused me. My wrecked car was surrounded by bison. Still prone, Peggy was frantically working the chrome handle in a vain attempt to roll up the smashed-out window.

Then I thought of the old Colt revolver. I didn't think that even so massive a pistol as the Peacemaker would kill one of the shaggy behemoths, but the noise — with its big, .45-caliber cartridges and its shortened barrel, made a Hellacious racket — might panic the mammoth creatures into a long-distance run . . . away from us. Miracles still happen. The glove compartment had not come open during the demolition of the rest of the car, yet it opened easily for me.

One of the hideous, red-eyed heads had intruded over the edge of the buckled door on Peggy's side and, screaming mindlessly, she threw up her arms to fend it off. I saw the mouth open, the tremendous tongue came out and lick along the upper surface of her right arm, removing the skin almost from elbow to wrist. That was when I cocked, levelled and fired the big pistol, point-blank!

The bison just rolled one of those red hell-eyes at me, and made to lower head and flaying tongue toward the now-unconscious body of my wife. But, suddenly, the old Indian was there, sitting on his horse.

His lips moved in the shaping of words that could not have been English or any other language I spoke, yet I could clearly understand him.

"No, Children of The Mother, these two are not accursed of Her."

I wasn't fully conscious or rational for weeks and, of course, no one believed a word of my account of what happened. All of it was blamed on shock and my concussion. The various law-enforcement types were of the opinion that the fact I had a pistol and had fired a "warning shot" had kept the maniacs who had mutilated all the bodies from the bus and poor Olaf's away from me and Peggy. Nor could her story corroborate my own

since her mind had mercifully blanked out the horrors of that day.

The coroner's inquest decided that the bus had been driven too fast and had gone into the fatal skid upon rounding the curve above the bridge and that the bodies had been mutilated by "person or persons unknown."

The copious cloven-hoofprints pressed into the rain-softened earth up and down the length and width of Slaughterhouse Valley were said to have been there before the accident, caused by a herd of reservation cattle surreptitiously driven by Indians from their own barren ranges of wiregrass to feed the night long on the verdant, state-owned roadsides before being driven back to the reservation before dawn. This was known to be fact because only the dirt-poor Reservation Indians did not shoe their starveling nags, and the prints of unshod horsehooves had been found here and there.

By the time I was released from the hospital in Regen, the county seat, thirty five miles from Lost Herd, the summer was well along. So that she could more easily visit me during my protracted confinement, Peggy had gotten Wolff Knipsengeldt to teach her to drive and then had bought Olaf Bauer's Bel-Air sedan from her instructor, who acted as agent in most of the used car sales in Lost Herd.

Old Wolff was, as well, the source of most of what follows, since he was the only townsperson who did not show acute discomfort whenever I came around and who did not change the subject, clam up or walk rapidly away when an outsider broached the subject of the sinister tragedy in Slaughterhouse Valley.

Not only had the state police investigators come back to Lost Herd, but various federal officials, as well. The Governor, himself, had been in town for a few days, and most of his entourage had remained when he did leave — a mixed bag of experts in specialties ranging from forensic medicine and game management through highway engineering and psychology.

Within the seven days which followed the "accident," every square inch of land surface, every building, construction or excavation of any nature was covered and re-covered by posses of townsmen and farmers under the sheriff and his deputies, two full battalions of National Guardsmen trucked up from the state capital, a busload of federal marshals and FBI agents, most of the male students and staff from the college and even a contingent of mounted Indians from Buffalo Mountain Reservation. They searched a fifteen-mile radius of Lost Herd, by day and by night. Crop dusters flew their light planes at almost treetop level, keeping in touch with the ground parties by radio.

A farmer some miles northeast of Lost Herd had a fine Holstein bull killed when the animal made the fatal error of charging a group of Guardsmen crossing his pasture one night; he fell under a hail of rifle and sub-machine gun fire. Several coyotes were shot, here and there; and a couple of deer poachers apprehended. A hired hand on Otto Kleist's

dairy farm was determined to be an Army deserter, arrested, and returned to some post clear down in Texas. But his and those of the poachers were the only arrests ever made. No slightest trace was ever discovered of the maniac or maniacs responsible for the mutilations.

Wolff did say that, high up on Buffalo Mountain, a cave had been discovered, its mouth almost closed by an old rock slide all overgrown with trees that had stood there at least fifty years. Two skeletons were found far back in the cave. One was that of a small horse and the other that of a man.

Those forensic types still in Lost Herd determined that the horse had most likely starved to death, as there were no marks of violence on the desiccated skin stretched over the bones and since marks of equine teeth were found in the partially-chewed-away poles which had formed the creature's stall.

There was no question what had killed the man, what with a round hole half an inch in diameter in the forehead and most of the back of the skull missing. What was questioned was why no skin was found stretched over the human bones, save on the hands, feet and portions of the lower face. The dry, cool air of the cave had preserved the horse's skin, so why not the man's?

Another unanswered question was how, among a collection of rusty, antique pots and small hardware, had come to rest an antler-hilted knife. Its curved blade was bright and shiny, where it was not blotched with blood determined, by testing, to be of several different *human* types and no more than a few days old!

Wolff had only heard bits and pieces of my own story, third and fourth hand from people who did not believe it . . . or could not allow themselves to do so. When he asked me to tell him, I did; I told him all of it on the August evening he checked over the Bel-Air the last time. Peggy and I were to start the long drive east, to Ohio and the new positions we had accepted, the next day.

When I had finished, Wolff just stared at his bottle of beer for some minutes, then he shook his grizzled head and said, softly, "It's some things happens in this-here old worl', Franky, cain't nobody ever figger. So mos' folks jest swears them things dint never happen, nohow, an' the folks that see them things wuz teched or drunk or jest plain lyin'. They *has* to do thet way, Franky, elst they couldn' sleep nights. But jest 'cause them as dint see won't an' caint b'lieve, don't allus mean them p'culiar things dint happun."

Arising and setting down his beer bottle, he took a big flashlight from a shelf and walked toward the door, saying "C'mon, Franky. It's sumpin back in the junkyard you needs to see."

The Rambler had long-since been stripped of any usable parts and its crumpled, jaggedly ripped and scraped body was red with rust except in

those rare patches where a bit of paint remained. Wolff lifted off the passenger side door and laid it atop the crumbled fender, then opened the glove compartment and shone his light in.

"Franky, look in the left-han' back corner, there. See that-there hole? Now, looky here."

From beneath the seat, he pulled a rumpled and water-stained brown paper bag, delved a hand into it, then shone the beam on that palm. Across the grimy palm lay about five inches of a broad, sharp-pointed horn. At the wider end, it was raggedly shattered.

"Is this-here yours, Franky, or Miz Peggy's?"

I tried to answer but couldn't and ended shaking my head.

Wordlessly, Wolff put his hand into the still-open glove compartment and stuck the pointed end of the piece of horn in the peculiar hole. It fitted perfectly.

"When I towed this-here car in," he explained, "I natcherly put it in the locked lot over there, so wouldn' nobody mess with it 'til after Dep'ty Kalb an' th' Sher'f an' all had done pokin' at it. But, since you's my frien', Franky, I figgered to clean out the trunk an' glove c'mpartment, cause —nothin' 'ginst Karl Kalb, y'unnerstan' — it's some dep'ties got sticky fingers.

"After I'd done got ever'thin' out'n the trunk an' got the glove c'mpartment empty, I felt aroun' in there an' come out with thet. An', Franky, I purely had to pull to get'er out, too, she'd really dug in. How you reckon the end off some critter's horn come to be stuck th'ough there, anyhow, Franky?"

Again, I could picture the huge, shaggy, horned head of that monster bison, the red fires of hell flickering in its eyes. Again, I could feel myself jerking open the glove compartment to get to the old Colt, painfully cocking the hammer, then trying to force my tremulous hands to hold the heavy weapon level with a big, flaming eye. I figured, there in Wolff Knipsengeldt's junkyard, that it was entirely possible that the massive slug had missed the eye and struck the horn, propelling the splintered-off tip with sufficient force to imbed itself in the still-open glove compartment.

Neither Wolff nor I spoke as we picked our way between the rusty hulks and stacks of old tires, back to the grubby office and the bottles of warm beer, nor did we talk much as we finished that last beer together. But, after he had filled the Bel Air's tank, just before he extended his thick, grimy hand in farewell, he pressed the crumpled sack on me.

"Frank, most folks in town an' here'bouts cain' even stan' to think on *what* was done to them poor kids, much less *how* it mighta happund. That's why folks all wants you to think you dint see what really come down out there in *das Schlachthaus*. It'll be the same wherever you goes, too, an' after while, you'll likely start wonderin' if they ain't right an'



you wrong.

"Ever'time you start thinkin' like thet, Franky, you jest take out that there an' look at it, an' squeeze on it hard an' r'member that whutall folks says, you knows the truth . . . an' so does old Wolff Knipsengeldt, too."

I still have that old bit of horn. It's tucked away with a yellowed clipping from a Cincinnati paper, dated in early September of that year, a few weeks after Peggy and I came back east.

**LOST HERD, N. DAK. (AP)** This small farming community is once more in the news. On the first day of the current school year, yesterday morning, no children could be found in the yard of Lost Herd Elementary School, for the yard was crowded with a milling herd of buffalo, 53 of the huge wild cattle. No one here seems to know when or how they came into town, since residents did not see or hear them in the streets and none of the farmlands completely surrounding the town appear to have been recently crossed by so many large animals.

Deputy Sheriff K. S. Kalb states that five buffalo were found on the campus of a nearby college more than six months ago. Along with most other townspeople interviewed, Deputy Kalb thinks that the herd are part of a larger herd known to roam a park in Saskatchewan, which province borders on this state only bare miles north of Lost Herd.

Readers may recall that this little town was visited by tragedy last spring when 50 second and third grade children and three adults were killed in the wreck of a school bus two miles west of Lost Herd.

## ***MOVING?***

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# THE DISTRESSING DAMSEL

by David Langford

art: George Barr

*This is David Langford's first US magazine sale, if one doesn't count Destinies of lavender-scented memory. A British subject, David is known for his hobbies — savoring Real British Ale and collecting antique hearing aids.*

*Margaret Thatcher might be wise to send Prince Andrew a copy of David's non-fiction book, War in 2080: The Future of Military Technology (US: Morrow 1979).*

*David also has an SF novel out — The Space Eater (Timescape) — and is working on another. Oh yes, and he shares billing with Peter Nicholls and Brian Stableford in the current The Science in Science Fiction (Knopf 1983). Sounds like Britain's answer to Gregory Benford, a furtive pundit was heard to mutter.*

Once upon a time, in a far-off land, there lived a princess who developed an unfortunate social problem.

The kingdom of Altrund extended over more square leagues of fertile land than the Court Mathematician could compute. So its King would occasionally boast, delaying as long as possible the admission that his Court Mathematician (a retarded youth of fourteen) had never yet fathomed the intricacies of the numbers after VIII.

The Mathematician, who also bore the titles of Palace Swineherd and Master of the Buckhound, was the only child of the peasant classes — both members of which seemed discouraged by their first experiment in being ancestors. King Fardel periodically worried that his peasant classes might at any moment die out altogether; and likewise the kingdom's upper middle class, consisting of a decrepit imbibler called Grommet (Grand Vizier, Chancellor of the Palace Exchequer, Wizard Pro-Tem, Steward of the Royal Cellars, Scullion, Seeker of the King's Treasury, *etcetera*). Even the King's own dynasty showed every sign of decay. Twenty years ago he had looked forward to the sedate begetting of three sons, two of whom would do tremendously well in the world while the youngest would somehow contrive to outdo them both and be extraordinarily virtuous in addition. Alas, Queen Kate was a woman of sadly independent mind and womb, and had called a halt to the dynasty after the inconvenience of producing the Princess Fiona. Fardel could only resign himself to the passive role of devising tests, ready to assess the worthiness of the princes who (in threes) must inevitably arrive to seek

the hand of his daughter. The King's first thought had been to avoid the formalities of quests and dragons by, quite simply, asking each suitor how old he was: the virtues of the youngest prince in any representative trio were well known. Later it occurred to Fardel that this was *too* well known, and that all but the youngest would undoubtedly lie about their age.

His next experiment had been to station a hideous dwarf on the one road into the valley of Altrund. Only the most morally sound princes would have a kind word for this creature, and thus virtue would be revealed. It failed, however, to be revealed in the dwarf, who took to supplementing his weekly pittance by severely beating and robbing passers-by — including, the King was sure, at least one incognito prince. The dwarf had had to be discharged, just as Fiona came to marriageable age with enough princess-like beauty to make the King study his plump Queen with wonder and suspicion. After considering and rejecting a version of the ancient shell game which involved caskets of gold, of silver, and of lead, King Fardel sighed and arranged for the construction of a traditional golden road.

Fiona was walking along it now, brooding as usual on her horrid obligation to marry a prince of peculiar virtue. The theory of the golden road was that crasser and more worldly princes would give too much thought to the road's market value, and would discreetly ride along the grassy verge to the left or right; only a prince preoccupied with Fiona's beauty would unconsciously ride down the middle of the road, to victory. How anyone who had not yet reached King Fardel's dilapidated palace could have known so much about Fiona's beauty was not explained by the theory. The princess had never had the heart to point this out, nor to add that, personally, she would incline towards a prince who could be trusted to wipe his boots at the door rather than walk in preoccupied with beauty. Meanwhile the surface of the golden road, never very thick at the best of times, had suffered the depredations of brigands, jackdaws, itinerant tax collectors, and (Fiona was sure, though the King refused to believe it) at least one incognito prince. Tiny gleams of gold could still be seen amid the trampled earth and grass, though only in brilliant sunshine like today's; fewer such gleams were visible in the King's treasury, and Fardel was rumored to be having second thoughts about crassness and worldliness.

Fiona walked down the middle of the formerly golden road and dreamed again of her own ambition, which did not involve princes. She rather wanted to be a witch.

"A plague of frogs," she crooned happily. "A plague of boils. A plague of toads. That would show them. Princes!"

There was almost no magic in Altrund, apart from the heavily mortgaged magic mirror which was the palace's last valuable asset . . . but a wisp or two of enchantment had been left behind, like forgotten tools, by



the obliging Graduate Sorcerer who had polished up the golden road; and perhaps one of these wisps twined itself into Fiona's girlish daydreams of epidemic frogs, boils, and toads. Certainly, without her noticing it, her aimless walk swerved off the road, through a clump of trees, through a stand of nettles (which despite her long skirt she did emphatically notice) and finally, at a slight run, to a malodorous pond she had not seen before.

"Be careful!" said a croaking voice from almost underfoot.

Princess Fiona recoiled slightly, and stared down at a singularly obnoxious and wart-encrusted toad on the damp grass at the pond's rim. It stared back at her for some moments, breathing heavily. "Stamping on toads," it complained at last, "is not in accordance with Royal protocol."

"A fig for Royal protocol," said Fiona airily, though uncertain of precisely what a fig might be.

"Well, you might as well get on with it," said the toad.

"Pardon?"

"Oh dear me, I can see your education has been neglected. Did they never tell you about certain, *erk*, traditions of enchantment?"

Something was indeed beginning to dawn on the princess, who drew still further away. "Ah," she said, "The Acting Royal Governess is a dear old fellow called Grommet, but I don't think he knows very much except about vintages. Suppose I go and ask him, though —" She took another cautious step backwards.

"Stop!" said the toad. "And let me tell you a tale."

Alarmingly, the princess found herself rooted to the ground.

The toad said, complacently, "I have strange power of speech; even though I can only usually stop one of three."

"I rather think this is lese-majesty," said Fiona, still struggling to lift her feet.

The toad fixed her with its glittering, golden eyes. "Once upon a time I fell foul of a wicked wizard in the College of Sorcery, who laid upon me the curse which you see, and in addition caused me to be magically flung to the most God-forsaken land in all the world."

"Where was that?" asked Fiona, curious.

The toad gave a croaking cough. "Let me put this tactfully. Where did you find me?"

"Oh," said the princess.

"But the incantation of binding did include a customary reversion clause. *Erk*. A matter of, as one might say, osculatory contact."

"No," said Fiona.

"A momentary and fleeting matter. None of your exotic requirements like being taken into a princess's bed all night. Merely the kiss of a good person whose moral worth stands in a certain relation to one's own."

"No."

"Think of it like this. Obviously you are a princess of high breeding —"

"At least you can tell," said Fiona, flattered.

"The tiara *is* rather a giveaway."

"It's pewter. We're a very poor kingdom; my father has only fivescore subjects even when you count the sheep."

"All the better," said the toad. "In poverty there is tremendous moral worth. And as I was saying — since you are a princess I'll wager five to one that your father has planned all sorts of grotesque and ridiculous ways of testing the princes who come seeking your hand."

She sighed, and nodded.

"Precisely! But are *you* worthy? Should *you* too not be tested according to the ancient customs of the world? Have *you* given a crust of bread to a dwarf recently?"

Princess Fiona opened her mouth and closed it again. She looked critically at the toad. "Look. If I take your curse off you, can we simply leave it at that? I'm going to the College of Sorcery myself — if my parents will ever let me — and I'll learn to make my own living. Getting involved with princes can wait, thank you very much."

"I shall make no further claims on you," said the toad in the sincerest of croaks. And then, as she still hesitated: "You could always shut your eyes."

Looking the toad severely in the eye, the princess knelt, bent forward, and bestowed an exceedingly chaste kiss somewhere in the general region of its head. For an instant a cloud seemed to pass over the Sun, and there was that unmistakable tingle which comes with enchantment or champagne.

She leant back, still kneeling. Sure enough, where an ugly, warty toad had squatted, there was now a sleek and handsome frog.

"I see," the princess said after a long moment.

"Ahh, it's good to be back to normal," said the frog. "Thank you, your majesty. I feel as fit as a . . . prince." At this point it appeared to notice something. "Oh. Conservation law. Well, I must be going. *Awk.*"

The last agonized croak was because Fiona had noticed the same something, and had seized the wriggling frog in a firm grip. Her previously pale and lily-white hands were now covered in warts that crowded together like cobblestones.

"You knew this was going to happen!" she shrieked.

"Well, it was just a bare possibility," said the frog.

Fiona squeezed it vengefully, and with distaste repeated the kiss. Nothing happened.

"Now that is interesting," said the frog. "I suppose we are no longer equal in moral worthiness, as is necessary for such curses to be transferred."

Distracted, the princess dropped the slimy creature. "*Equal?* You're not telling me a princess is morally the same as a toad?"

"Ah. You are very virtuous, for a princess; and I was very virtuous, for

a toad. As a frog I'm far more despicable, since I'm gloating terribly over having shifted my curse to a poor innocent creature like yourself. — Excuse me," it added, dodging the princess's foot as it came down. "I must go and see a man about a frog." With a splash, it was gone.

Princess Fiona stared into the murky water; the ripples died and her own reflection took shape. It seemed an appropriate time to shut her eyes, but she forced them to stay open: her fingers could feel the swarming warts on her face, and she might as well learn just how unprincesslike her complexion had become. In the water, though, it looked the same as ever. Apparently magical warts had no reflections; possibly they did not even cast shadows, though this would be slightly more difficult to test.

The sun was lower in the sky. The princess's vague thoughts of throwing herself with a despairing cry into the pool, or of becoming a hermit never again to be seen by mortal man, were dispelled by the more practical considerations of duckweed and dinner.

She walked more and more slowly, though, as the palace came into view — a quarter-mile frontage of crumbling marble and alabaster. It seemed uncountable ages old, though in fact the former King of Altrund had caused it to be erected in a single night by means of a substandard wishing ring. Alas, the accumulated cost of servants and repairs was somewhat further beyond the dreams of avarice than the wealth King Sivvens had requested with his second wish: while the wasted third wish, said to have involved the former Queen and a sausage, was among the family's best kept secrets.

Taking a short cut through the disused portions of the palace, Fiona passed in succession through the Great Hall, the Great Ballroom with its litter of shrivelled pumpkins, the Great Dungeon, and the cobwebbed Great Cupboard before nearing the inhabited rooms. There she paused, hearing voices beyond the half-open door of the Great Sitting-Room.

"... exceedingly sorry about this wine," her father the King was saying. "We have far finer vintages, but the Steward of the Royal Cellars keeps, ah, misplacing them. But, to business! Naturally you come seeking the hand of my daughter, the beauteous flower of a most wealthy and kingly line. — I must apologize that so much of the palace is being redecorated just now," he added inventively.

There was an uneasy triple murmur.

"Well, my good princes, what dowry would you bring to be worthy of such a bride?"

The first prince's voice was loud: "I am a crafty conqueror whose blood-dripping sword will hack a ruinous path of carnage through battlefields steeped in gore. And my consort will be no mere Queen but the Empress of an all-destroying Emperor!"

"Creditable," said the King.

The voice of the second prince inclined towards oiliness. "Emperors may hold the world by the throat, but a merchant prince can put a noose of purse-strings about the throats of Emperors. Already I possess an immense fortune, and ultimately my Queen will share wealth beyond the dreams of avarice."

"*Very creditable,*" said the King. On the tip of his tongue, Fiona thought, was the urgent question: "How far beyond the dreams of avarice?"

The third voice was thin and reedy and set her teeth on edge. "When tyrants, moneylenders, and even the stones above their unhallowed graves have fallen all to dust, my name shall linger on. To my Queen I bring no more than unquenchable love and immortality in verse and song. I am a poet," he explained.

Outside, Fiona made a hideous face and was sobered by the thought of how more than hideous it must be. Inside, there was an embarrassed little pause.

"More wine, perhaps?" said the King at last.

"Thanks," said the three princes together: "I don't mind if I do."

After a tentative query about the suitors' ages (which shed a sad light on the tendency of palace records to become lost, burnt or consumed by rats), the King suggested that some simple test of worthiness for the Princess Fiona's hand would be appropriate.

"None of those meaningless, old-fashioned tests," he said with great fervour. "It is nonsense to have a beautiful princess's fate decided by whether or not one speaks kind words to a dwarf —"

("Yes indeed," said the first prince grimly.)

"Or by the ability to slay huge and ferocious dragons —"

("Hear, hear," said the second prince.)

"Or by impractical talents like the soothing of savage beasts with verse and song —"

("Oh, I say," said the third prince.)

"No. We are practical men, you and I. Let us straightaway agree that he who at the end of three days returns with the most colossally valuable dowry shall win the hand of the Princess Fiona."

"*Colossal?*" the merchant prince said in a pained voice.

Feeling it was nearly time to put a stop to this, Fiona peered around the half-open door. Without showing herself, she could see all four men reflected in the magic mirror on the far wall — a tall slab of pure, enchanted silver which magically attracted dust and smears (or so Fiona felt, one of her household duties being to keep it polished).

The King sat on a portable throne with his back to the mirror: facing him across the table were the three princes, and Fiona squinted to study them. The first was short and looked bad-tempered; for some reason he kept one hand tucked into his tunic. The second was sufficiently stout



that he had to sit some way back from the table. The third, the poet, was tall and might have been almost handsome; but at the time of his christening, someone had neglected to invite whichever fairy is responsible for bestowing chins.

"Happiness," the King was saying, "is all very well, but it can't buy money."

The merchant prince glanced at his companions, as though estimating the strength of the bidding. "A moderate amount," he began — and his moist eyes met Fiona's in the mirror. "Oh. Perhaps even a reasonably substantial amount," he went on, and licked his lips.

Before Fiona could move, the wary gaze of the soldier also found her. He, too, licked his lips. He, too, studied his rivals; absent-mindedly he dropped a hand to the pommel of his sword. Meanwhile the poet also had seen Fiona's reflected glory, and was mumbling what appeared to be an impromptu villanelle.

With a certain inner glee, Princess Fiona strode into the room and let her suitors see her, warts and all. Betrothal to any of these three, she considered, would undoubtedly be a fate worse than . . . well, warts.

"Father," she said sweetly, "I seem to have this curse."

King Fardel turned, gaped, closed his eyes and moaned softly.

"Only making a preliminary tactical survey, of course —" said the first prince.

"Cannot be expected to enter into a binding commitment at this stage of negotiation," said the second.

"Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new," muttered the poet.

The princess helped herself to a glass of the wine — which was indeed only a locally produced Falernian type — and told a discreetly edited version of her adventure. "And so," she concluded, "only the kiss of a man of proper moral worth can lift this dreadful enchantment from me!"

"Meaningless, old-fashioned tests," said the King through his teeth. With a visible effort he steeled himself to the necessities of tradition. "Very well. Whosoever shall with a kiss lift the curse from my fair daughter, him shall she wed, and we'll have a quiet chat about marriage settlements afterwards."

Inwardly Fiona was praying a twofold prayer: firstly, that one of these unlikely princes would somehow prove equal to her in moral worth, and secondly, that the King would not countenance her betrothal to a prince invisible beneath layers of warts.

After heartening himself with several long looks at the princess's unspoilt reflection, the first suitor stepped forward. He hesitated, though, on the very brink. "You could always shut your eyes," she said. He snorted, and Fiona bent down to receive a kiss of military efficiency. Nothing happened. The prince made a strategic withdrawal to the previously prepared position of his chair.

When the second prince had screwed his determination to the sticking-place, Fiona found that she had to lean forward over his firkin of a stomach before their lips were close enough for an economical and businesslike kiss. Again, nothing happened.

"I am, after all, the youngest," the third prince murmured; and Fiona turned up her face for a final kiss which was not so much poetic as chinless. The only result was that the poet-prince turned green as a frog and lurched backwards, gabbling something about aesthetic values. Fiona found this disheartening.

With a resigned expression, the King rose and clapped his hands to draw attention. "Whosoever shall in three days return with a healing spell, charm, cantrip, physic, unguent, balm, lotion, potion, philtre, talisman, relic, totem, fetish, icon, incantation, rune, amulet, panacea —" At this point his breath failed him and he collapsed into uncontrollable coughing. But the suitors had gathered the general drift; they bowed to the King and (with averted gaze) to Fiona, and departed as one prince.

"Oh . . . rats," said Princess Fiona.

". . . theurgy, thaumaturgy, sorcery, wizardry, necromancy, invocation, conjuration . . ." continued the afflicted King, rallying slightly. His voice died away as he noticed an absence of princes. There followed a stern lecture on the perfidy of faithless daughters who abandoned themselves to the embraces of strange frogs on the very day when three superlatively eligible suitors presented themselves, or at any rate two, or perhaps just one, but all the same . . . Still muttering, he left to consult the Court Physician, yet another post ineptly filled by the man Grommet.

Fiona pulled up a footstool and sat staring into the magic mirror. "Mirror, mirror," she said briskly. There was a soft chime, and the silver clouded over.

"Good afternoon," said the mirror. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Fiona regarded the mirror suspiciously. "You may have noticed this wart," she said, touching one chosen at random.

"That is not a problem. That is a solution."

"That's not exactly an answer," said Fiona.

"You did not exactly ask a question," the mirror said smugly. "But consider. You have always wished to be a witch. Now you look the part, if not more so. You have always wished half-heartedly to run away and enroll at the College of Sorcery. Now, with one of three eminently unlovable princes likely to cure your complexion and claim your hand in two days, twenty-three hours and thirty-seven minutes, you have an excellent reason for running away. What more could you ask?"

"I was thinking more in terms of being a beautiful sorceress full of sinister glamour," said the princess. "Not a warty crone. Now is there a way I can lift the curse myself in the next day or two?"

"Indeed . . . there . . . is," said the mirror with what sounded like

reluctance.

"What is it?"

"Unfortunately . . . I cannot actually tell you, for reasons you would find absolutely inarguable if only I could tell you them." The fog in the mirror began to clear again. "Your three minutes are nearly up."

"If you can't tell me that cure, suggest another," Fiona said furiously.

"You might try throwing a party for all the peasantry," said the silvery voice, diminuendo. "There is this party game called Postman's Knock . . ."

Then the voice and the fog were gone, and the omniscient magic mirror (which, as it happened, could be consulted only once in any three days) was again no more than a mirror.

Resisting her urge to give the silver a vicious kick, Princess Fiona left the room and climbed the eight flights and three spirals of stairs to the Great Boudoir. There she found Queen Kate placidly sewing hair shirts for the peasantry, who generally used these royal gifts to repair the roof of their hovel.

"Oh dear," said the Queen when Fiona had told her tale. "You're such a trial to me, sometimes I think you must have been changed for a goblin when you were a baby, that's all I can say, well you brought it on yourself, going out without your warm shawl . . ."

Fiona was used to being called a changeling in the course of any and every scolding, though in fact the local goblins were notoriously choosy. Several times, and with good reason, the peasantry had abandoned their ill-favoured son Dribble (Court Mathematician) outside known goblin caves, and each time he had been politely returned.

"Well," said her mother, coming to the point as she occasionally did: "I can see I still have to clear up your messes after you, just like when you were a baby, let me see, I know I put it somewhere, yes, here it is. . . ." She pulled a dusty and unsavoury-looking object from a cluttered drawer. "There you are, you just put this in your hair like a good girl, something my stepmother gave me once, a poisoned comb . . ."

Fiona hastily retreated a pace or two.

" . . . just you put it in your hair and there you are, you stay asleep like the dead for ten years or a hundred or whatever, until Prince Right comes along and takes the comb out of your hair and kisses you and all the rest of it, nothing like outliving your troubles, that's what my mother always used to say . . ."

But Fiona was already on her way to ask the advice of Grommet. She found him in the Great Pantry testing the quality of the King's best wine with his usual conscientiousness. When he had recoiled from her appearance and listened to her story, he recalled his position as Chief Palace Torturer and made a slurred suggestion.

"Down in, um, down in one of the Great Torture Chambers, um, can't

remember exactly which one, there's a, mmm, very nice iron mask. Very nice indeed. Good, um, workmanship. You might like to wear it . . . ?"

"Thank you," said Fiona coldly.

The next day, heart hardened by the bedtime discovery that her affliction was by no means confined to hands and face, she set about a systematic programme of being kissed by the entire reluctant population of Altrund — even the all too aptly named lad Dribble. Every one of them, it seemed, was either despicably lacking in moral worth or unfairly endowed with it. In the afternoon, after a lack of success with several sheep, she waylaid a wandering friar. The friar denounced her both before and afterwards as a sinful temptation sent by the devil; Fiona considered this to be undue flattery.

On the second day she gathered, compounded, infused, and drank no less than sixty-four traditional herbal remedies, whose taste varied across a wide spectrum from unpleasant to unheard-of. An omen presented itself when the word NARCISSUS was found written in frogspawn across the palace forecourt, but no decoction of this plant's flowers, leaves, stem, or root had the slightest visible effect. The day's only success was scored by a mysterious and forgotten elixir found in the palace medicine cabinet: the dose remaining in the phial sufficed to remove one medium-sized wart from the back of the princess's left hand. This was hailed as a great stride forward by almost everyone, except Fiona.

On the morning of the third day, a more than usually appalling dwarf arrived at the palace. He boasted a squint, a bulbous nose, a club foot, a humped back, a cauliflower ear, and all the other impedimenta so fashionable among dwarves. Moreover, his complexion bore a startling resemblance to Fiona's.

"I'll riddle ye a riddle, my maiden fair," he said to the princess, leaping and capering with repulsive agility. "I'll riddle your warts away with riddling words, that I will, and ye must riddle my name. If ye riddle it not aright, then ye must be mine forever. Will ye riddle me this riddle, fair princess?"

At this difficult juncture the King came into the Great Reception Room to inspect the visitor. "Why, Rumpelstiltskin, old chap," he cried.

"Bah," said the dwarf, and left in considerable dudgeon.

The afternoon wore on; the sun sank in the sky; and the Court Mathematician, stationed in the topmost tower of the palace, presently came running down to announce the sighting of four princes in the distance. When sent aloft to count again, he corrected this estimate to two. Sure enough, three princes came riding up to the Great Door and took their turns to blow the Great Horn which had hung there since the rusting of the Great Knocker.

Fiona's spirits sank lower as once again the King and princes sat about

the table. Would it be worst to endure a husband steeped in gore, like the first prince; or one glistening with greasiness, like the second; or one who like the third was simply wet?

Unwrapping his burden, the soldier prince slammed an iron bowl down on the table. Something slimy and dark-red bubbled within, and a fearful, mephitic stench expanded to fill the room. "I bring as my gift the hot blood from a dragon's heart, slain by my own staunch sword this very morn! Let the princess sup deep ere it cools, and all her ills shall be healed."

"Let the bowl be covered lest it cool too soon," the King suggested, with all the dignity possible to a man firmly clutching his nose.

The second prince unveiled an exquisite golden chalice studded with costly gems. Little blue flames flickered over it; there was a yet more choking and paralysing reek. "Let not the fair princess's lips be sullied with horrid gore," said this prince, already speaking with the air of a favourite son. "Here is fiery brimstone and quicksilver torn at *colossal* expense from the heart of the Smoking Mountain! Let its cleansing fire now burn this affliction from the maiden's skin."

"Excellent," the King said manfully through paroxysms of coughing. "Now it merely remains —"

"Excuse me," said the third prince, producing a thick roll of parchment.

"Oh yes," said the King. "Sorry,"

"Let not these crude and crass remedies defile the sweet princess either within or without. I bring the Master Cantrip of Purification, prepared by myself from the most authentic sources. Let the princess but listen to its nineteen thousand stanzas — of a wondrous poetry withal, fit to charm the very soul from the body — and doubtless the bane which lies upon her shall melt away and be gone like the snows of, ah, last winter."

For some reason Fiona found this prospect the most depressing of the three.

At the table there was a hot altercation as to whether the dragonblood or brimstone should be tested first; even the poet agreed half-heartedly that his nineteen thousand stanzas should be allowed to come as a climax rather than be squandered too early in the proceedings. Fiona herself was stationed by the mirror so that her wartless and undeniably attractive reflection could maintain the princes' enthusiasm at a decent level. Admiring her profile out of the corner of one eye, she was struck by a sudden thought.

Thanks more to the resources of the Great Library than those of the Acting Royal Governess, the Princess Fiona had had an excellent classical education.

"Very well," the King was saying. "Let blind Chance make the choice between you; let the Fates guide my unseeing finger." He stood, clapped

the fingers of his left hand over both eyes, and waved the other hand in mystic arabesques. It came to rest pointing unerringly and confidently at the second, or merchant, prince. "So be it!" said the King when he had made a great show of peeling the fingers from his eyes. "Now, as to the method of application —"

The stench of brimstone was alarmingly strong. But the princess had discovered that when one is about to be forcibly cured of warts in mere minutes, it concentrates the mind wonderfully. She reached the end of her train of thought, nodded, murmured "Narcissus" under her breath — and leant to touch lips with her own morally identical image in the mirror.

For an instant shadows flitted in the room, and Fiona felt an unmistakable tingle. Rapidly the mirror filled with fog; she had never before seen warty fog.

"Oh *fie*," said a silvery but exasperated voice. "You guessed."

When the fog cleared Fiona saw that her image was thoroughly encrusted with warts; so, interestingly, were the images of the King, the princes, the walls, and the furniture. Rubbing her once again lily-white hands with satisfaction, she stood and moved towards the table.

"Father," she said sweetly, "I have some good news for you."

King Fardel turned, gaped, closed his eyes, and moaned faintly. The princes appeared momentarily speechless.

"Alackaday," she cried, "the royal word of my father the King must prevent my marrying any of you good and noble princes. Only the curer of my affliction may seek my hand. Oh woe!" Fiona was beginning to enjoy herself.

"I do not remember those particular words," said the merchant.

"You left before he'd finished," she reminded him.

"All's well that ends well," said the King tediously, "and no doubt some simple quest on the sound cash basis I originally suggested —"

"Oh woe!" said Fiona, injecting as much agony into her tones as she could. "The royal word of my father the King may not be lightly set aside. It is my doom to travel now to the College of Sorcery, there to learn which mighty enchanter has lifted my curse from afar — and thus earnt my hand in marriage."

"Now wait a minute," the first prince said.

"But perhaps wiser counsels may be found over good food and good wine," said the princess in softer tones. "I shall summon the Master of the Revels, the Palace Butler, the Steward of the Royal Cellars, the Court Jester, the Chef to the King's Court, the Royal —"

"All right," said the King, brightening somewhat. "He's in the Great Pantry, I believe. Wiser counsels, yes, over food and drink and merriment . . ." Again he studied the second prince and seemed to be inwardly calculating.

"And I could still read you my lovely cantrip," the third prince was saying wistfully as Fiona slipped out of the room.

She sent Grommet to the men with quantities of wine; she retreated to her room, changed clothes, and picked up a bundle of necessities she had had packed for some little while; she made her stealthy way to the normally disused Great Stables. There was no difficulty at all in choosing between the three steeds there. The huge fiery stallion which constantly rolled its eyes and foamed at the mouth looked more inclined to devour princesses than carry them; the asthmatic and broken-backed donkey reminded her too much of its owner. Bowing at last to the King's whim, she saddled the stout gelding with the richly bejewelled harness and set off. There was an inn not far outside the valley, the Prancing Prince; Fiona thought she could reach it before dark.

Near the pond she reined in and dismounted.

"Thanks for the hint," she called. "About Narcissus."

A croak answered her. "Don't mention it; a mere afterthought. *Noblesse oblige.*"

"I have a proposition for you," said Fiona. "I'm off to the College of Sorcery to enroll as a student witch, and I'll be needing a familiar. Talking cats are ten a penny, but a talking frog, now . . ."

"Pint of fresh milk every day and it's a bargain."

And so the Princess and the frog rode out of the tale together, and lived happily ever after.

## CARTOON

## CARTOON



William Rotsler

Alexis Gilliland

## THE BEST MEDICINE

by Robert Morrell, Jr.

art: George Barr



*Robert Morrell, Jr. lives in Lewisville NC with wife Marcia, daughter Beth, cats Winston and Winter, and a computer/word processor; though, as some are quick to point out, not necessarily in that order.*



"When was your last check-up?"

*Here it comes, prepare to act surprised.* "March. They make you see white a lot when you're on skip patrols."

"Hmm."

"Didn't they teach you anything about tact in medical school?"

"Oh, no, don't worry, it's nothing like that. It's just something that should have been noticed."

*It worked!* Hanson thought. *I wonder exactly what I did?* "Like what?" he finally said.

"You've got teeth growing in your foot."

"What?"

"Wisdom teeth, impacted against your heel. It's rare, but not unheard of: I could take them out this afternoon. It'd give you a week of M.E."

"Teeth in my foot?"

"Be glad they're not in your mouth — I couldn't do them, and our oral surgeon was transferred out last week." The doctor sat back in his chair. "It would make a blurb in the journals if it weren't for all the war medicine."

Hanson frowned. *Could it be coincidence?* "How did it happen?"

"Congenital defect, I believe. A few cells got mixed up back when you were just a few cells, and later . . . you get the urge to brush your toes."

Hanson's frown deepened. *That's not what I was aiming for. A new leg muscle, or a reinforced ankle, but teeth? Well, Ergas said it might take practice.*

"The mystery," the doctor continued, "is what triggers it after all these years, and in your case, how it sprouted so quickly. When do you go out again, son?"

"Sir? Oh, probably next week."

"Well, the foot should be healed by then. Now, this won't hurt a bit . . ."

"Now this won't hurt a bit . . ." Ergas mocked. "Primitive flesh hacker! Did he really cut your foot open? To the air?"

Hanson watched the star field in his view-port rotate slowly. As usual, the monitors showed nothing, but he could feel the alien's voice resonating through the ship and knew it was real. "Sure, Erg, it's called a minor operation, perfectly safe."

"What's a major one? No, no, don't even think it, you'll probably tell me that they pry your ribs apart to get at your heart." The voice seemed to shudder. "So, for all your trouble, what did you learn?"

"That I need more practice. All I did was activate some misplaced embryonic cells. How do I change the original blueprints?"

"My, my, you have been studying."

"Well, I had to stay off my foot, so it seemed the thing to do."

"Sometimes academic knowledge can interfere with the control with mis-

directed symbols."

"Oh."

"Don't worry, though: by the time I'm finished with you, you'll be able to grow eyes in the back of your head if you want."

"Ergas, why are you doing this for me?"

"Boredom, mostly. Your physiology bugs me — sort of like seeing a picture hung crooked."

"You've been studying, too: your English is getting polished."

"I found some of your radio and TV bands: very strange. I saw a couple of old war movies — *Father Goose* and *The Longest Day*."

"Those are old."

"You've been popping lightspeed, boy."

"Oh, yeah."

"I've got a question, though. In those stories the war was always over land, neighbors quarreling over boundaries and such. But here you are slug-ging it out with each other light-years away from the source of the hostilities."

Hanson shrugged. "I'm just a pilot. They say it's for the best. You've seen my arsenal. How long could we last if we spit those at each other at home?"

"Hmph. Like the two guys in a bar: 'Would you like to step outside?' Civilized insanity."

"I guess." Hanson paused. "Uh, Ergas, can I ask you a question?"

"Shoot, figuratively speaking of course."

"You said that you had a body once, a long time ago. What did it look like?"

"Hideous green and with tenacles, big bug eyes . . ."

"Come on, I'm serious."

"How do you know I'm not?"

Hanson sighed. Ergas spoke again. "You're not feeling guilty again, are you? For not telling anybody about me?"

"No, no . . . well, maybe a little. But who'd believe me? You said that you wouldn't speak if recorders were on, and my instruments can't detect you. They'd probably ground me for taking drugs during a flight." Hanson frowned at Ergas's changing of the subject. Ergas felt the frown and responded with an almost exasperated voice.

"Look, it's no more important to me than what you looked like as a baby is to you. I just don't want it as your mental image of me."

"Oh, well. That makes sense, I suppose," Hanson said sulkily. "But could you tell me about what you're doing here or where you're going? You know, your background."

A sigh vibrated through the ship. "Very well, but our lessons will be cut short."

"That's okay, I'm due for a follow-up medical when I get back. Wouldn't want anything radical to explain."

"Well then, if the truth must be known, I'm waiting for my date to show."

"What?"

"And I'm beginning to think that I'm being stood up."

"You're kidding, aren't you?"

"Do you want this in your language or not? I was doing a kind of cosmographical survey in this area, and I was supposed to meet this person —"

"Male or female?"

"Whatever. They had business in the area too, so we were going to meet here and go to the core for some . . . some star hopping. That seems the best way to express it, as a sort of dance, though it is so much more." Ergas's voice became wistful. "Riding the energy lines, coasting the gradients, peaking on the borderline . . . I'm sorry, your language is just inadequate for the experience."

"I think I get the idea."

"I doubt it. How about some lessons?"

"Sure, but let's not do anything drastic. I've been thinking, and it seems to me that I might have trouble explaining big changes."

"Good thinking — it's just stunt stuff anyway. Psychology is where it's at."

"I thought you said I could only work with genetics."

"True, but so much of your psychology is genetic. Your split brain, your rem sleep, even your blood sugar. And of course, those repressors they give you before long flights aren't for indigestion."

"Please, don't remind me."

"So if you modified some of these things, think how well adjusted you could be."

Hanson wrinkled his nose. "I hate that phrase. 'Well adjusted' sounds like a machine. The military shrinks use it whenever they want me to party less."

"Nonsense. Just think, you're always striving for some ideal chemical state. It's just the side effects that cause the trouble: hangovers, angry husbands, and the like. What if your body was naturally closer to that ideal?"

"I'd be drunk all the time." Hanson let out a rare laugh.

"There's an example, your laughter. Your laughter triggers a chemical euphoric and a muscle relaxant, but in too small amounts. If you increased the dosage a little you'd feel much better."

Hanson thought about it. "Sure, why not?"

"Okay then, now concentrate . . ."

"Lieutenant, I must say your health in the past six months has certainly improved. Your pressure is down, your ulcers are gone, and your cycles are regular as they can be. God knows I see enough tension disease these days: you're refreshing."

"Thank's doc, I try," Hanson said, and chuckled. "By the way, what is

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your nurse's name?"

Ergas phased up and down the spectra, fidgeting. With Hanson that made 768 laughing pilots. Each was genetically altered, a new dominant gene to be passed on to their children. Ergas chuckled imitatively. A non-genetic change he had made in the pilots' behavior would insure lots of children. *Maybe in a few generations enough of them will laugh at their silly wars.*

Suddenly Ergas detected a familiar presence approaching.

"Ergas?" a long-band signal pulsed.

"I'm here, Sehania."

"I'm sorry I'm late. Here, look at what I found in the cloud." Data radiated on every frequency.

"Interesting."

"I'm glad you waited. You didn't get bored, I trust."

"No, I just twiddled my thumbs for a while."

"Twiddled your what?" Sehania laughed.

Ergas and Sehania came into phase and flashed toward the core without thinking about it. "You know," Ergas said warmly, "I love it when you laugh."



## A MODEL PRISON

**Benign Tumors  
Of the Heart  
Were Killers Once**

— a headline in  
*The New York Times*

Repentant now, they fill the cells  
With Kyrics and rebel yells.  
"Death No More" in blood is scrawled  
Across the cafeteria walls.  
Into their arms they've carved paired hearts,  
And other lost or stolen arts  
Revive in shops that hum like hives.  
Observing this, we spare their lives.

— Tom Disch

# THE LEPRECHAUNS ARE ALIVE AND WELL IN SPITE OF THE EVIL EYE

FACT

by G. C. Edmondson

Little people indeed! Charming bit of folklore — along with pookas and banshees. But the evidence is about as convincing as the Loch Ness monster's. Had I ever given them any thought, I might have seen an ancient reality that lies like grit in an eyelid just beneath all that Disneyland fantasy.

It's not even an original fantasy. Casual investigation finds "little people" everywhere — in cultures as distant as South Africa and the South Pacific, where they're called *manahune*. An anthropologist with a Freudian bent might suspect that primitive man was locked into the same "imaginary playmate" phase that children enjoy and outgrow.

But in the South Pacific they're extinct — dead and gone as they are in Asia or Europe, the Americas or — in Ireland. Only the distorted memory survives. Without writing to keep records, straight memory distorts easily — so easily that it's hard to take things like the evil eye seriously. Yet this belief is perfectly logical.

Only since Newton has it become generally accepted that the eye is a passive organ that receives light impulses, and through some cerebral magic converts them into sight. Renaissance physicians still saw the eye as an emitter that captured the reflected echo of its own rays. Perhaps they were thinking of whale or bat sonar. Surely they had never imagined radar.

If the eye emits radiation, then the evil eye makes sense. No one today doubts that radar will cook whoever stands too close to the open oven door. But when Newton's laws of optics were accepted the evil eye quietly disappeared — except among the 90% of humanity that has never heard of Newton.

I first encountered the evil eye in Italy, where it is commonly known that *malocchio* does not necessarily imply malice on the part of the beholder. Some well-meaning people are just unlucky enough to be born with the evil eye. The prudent keep their offspring out of range, just as they would from a decent lady who adored children, but had infected so many that she became immortalized as Typhoid Mary. Belief in the evil eye is so strong in southern regions that witches and priests make housecalls to adjust malfunctioning magnetrons.

My second contact with the evil eye came unexpectedly. Perhaps because I lived too long in Mexico — or perhaps because I spoke the language better than Italian and thus never bothered to look into common idioms. One day I made a grievous social error and the looks were hard and cold.

"You should have patted his head," my lady explained.

"Why?"

"Why are you always asking why? That's just the way you do it. Don't

ever tell a mother her child is handsome without touching the child's head as you say it!"

"But there's got to be a reason."

"I don't know." She hesitated. "My mother always said if you don't, the kid will get conjunctivitis."

"Get what?"

"*Mal de ojo*. Your eyes get all red and mama has to unstick them with warm water in the morning . . ."

"But how does patting a kid's head prevent conjunctivitis?" I demanded. "Neither homeopathy nor sympathetic magic offers the faintest clue to what the Hell you're talking about." Then, before I could make a greater fool of myself, the scales fell from my eyes.

Of course! I could challenge the fates, say anything I wanted — so long as I contacted the potential victim. But when one flatters or praises, one sets the mills of the gods to grinding. Knocking on wood is not enough. Only *touching* would ground out the charge and render the remark harmless to whatever malefic influence might be listening in.

I was ready to laugh until I remembered my father, who always addressed my mother as "Old Woman." And Old Woman, who always referred to my father as "Himself."

It was neither age nor lack of affection. They were just careful never to divulge the potent lever of a name to whatever lurks beyond the light of a penny candle. Now I knew the why of that saccharinose nickname which they gave me and which neither wife nor Grand Inquisitor can drag from me — and why practically no one in my part of the world was ever known by his real name. All these years I'd been deceived by alien greekish concepts of rationality while everybody else knew how the world really works. All these years I had possessed the evil eye. And I never knew it!

*Malocchio* in Italian. *Mal de ojo* in Spanish. Somehow, probably during the endless wars for papal succession, the evil eye had been transmuted into sickness of the eye. Something had been lost in translation but the evil remained. So let it be with leprechauns.

They survive in such out-of-the-way places. Survive is about all they do. You can't say the poor little people flourish. And the Mediterranean had something to do with it too. That crazy basin keeps filling up and emptying at the most unexpected geological moments. Now that the Nile's outflow has been dammed the problem is once again critical — as it becomes each time the climate undergoes a major change. Without a small but constant inflow from the Black Sea and a much greater influx from the Atlantic, the Mediterranean would evaporate to a tiny, super-salty dead sea.

A few thousand years ago the undammed Nile managed to fill only a tiny lake in the eastern half of the basin while the Rhone created a similar lake below present-day Marseilles. Primitive man walked a land bridge from Libya to Italy. Then a quake split the Pillars of Hercules. The Atlantic has



leaked in through the Straits of Gibraltar ever since. It's hard saying whether Noah knew of this catastrophe, but the leprechauns must have.

Still, there are no skeletons in Europe. And, save for the well-upholstered Venus of Willendorf, there is scant evidence of steatopygia among present-day European women. That all stayed behind in Africa.

The leprechauns survive there in the Kalahari — just barely. Another generation or two should finish them off. Laurens van der Post found their “small, heart-shaped faces with the slightly pointed ears” unforgettable. They differ to such an extent that some anthropologists insist they are another species of human. Since they rape easily and the offspring are fertile, this is probably not true. At first glance they are black — until one sees them next to a real black. Then the little people with the pointed ears and heart-shaped faces are of an apricot hue.

Little women are steatopygous, which is a survival characteristic in a land of scarce waterholes and no pottery — where the only bottle is an emptied ostrich egg. Huge fat deposits on buttocks serve the same purpose as the camel's hump, metabolizing down to water and energy during the lean season. Men are not steatopygous but their permanent state of erection may help explain those satyr legends in Greek prehistory.

They inhabited most of South Africa until three centuries ago when the tall, cattle-herding Masai began moving south at about the same time the Boers started north from Capetown with their own herds. For hunting-and-gathering Bushmen it must have been a glimpse of paradise. Suddenly the land was full of strange beasts not so agile or murderous as the Cape Buffalo. The gods had brought them cows.

How could they have guessed a cow might have an owner who did not want it eaten?

Unhampered by Christian ethics, the Masai murdered cattle stealers, enslaved their women, and used halfbreed offspring for menial work beneath the dignity of a cowboy. Though they fought each other, Masai and Boer shared an antipathy to cattle rustling. They cooperated enthusiastically in the Bushman's extermination.

Boers applied Christian ethics and Christian gunpowder until they discovered more economical methods. Any herdsman knows the way to control predators is to sprinkle the half-eaten carcass of a cow or sheep with strychnine, and then keep the dogs tied up.

But the Bushmen were neither coyote nor wolf. The Boers applied other timetested methods, borrowing the smallpox-infested-blankets-from-the-pesthouse ploy from Lord Amherst's solution to an Indian problem in New England. Emulating Tasmanian colonists, they taught the natives to accept small gifts of flour — and then poisoned it.

Some Dutch recalled their Christian principles and struggled to educate the Bushman. Unfortunately, the little people couldn't seem to get the concept of ownership through their heads. They could, however, be bribed.

Cow stealing declined around those farmsteads which left a pail of milk on the back stoop.

In the long haul disease proved the best solution. Three hundred years of contact with Boer and Masai reduced the Bushman to a pitiful remnant crowded totally off the fertile lands — into the dry emptiness of the Kalahari.

*Put a saucer of milk by the kitchen door and the leprechaun will mend your shoes.* A dim vision of invasion began abuilding as I saw all the little bribes when hugebodied, cattleherding Celts moved into the Emerald Isle and wrestled with a native problem. There would have been atrocities. There would have been truces. Child-stealing for sure in a time when most children did not survive their first year and a healthy baby was an asset. There would also, possibly, have existed the rare cross-cultural friendship when one race struggled to understand the ways of another. But there is never any permanent friendship between cattleman and rustler. Apaches learned that.

It all fell together. Leprechauns were not a myth. They were for real but, like most losers, they were victims of history written by winners. Once the enemy is no longer dangerous one can wax sentimental. Bloodthirsty savages become Noble Redmen. A von Dänniken would have cranked out a quick book and made another million. I might have too — under an assumed name. But my nights would have been sleepless as I pondered that one inconvenient question: *where are the bones?*

If there were ever any Bushmen in Ireland, why are the survivors (even the Black Irish) so uncompromisingly white? A beautiful theory — but it just wasn't true.

Europe's migration left abundant archaeological evidence as Long Barrow people supplanted Kitchen Midden people who were succeeded by the Beaker people, or was it the other way around? The only unavoidable fact is that there were no negroid races in Europe.

Descriptions of leprechauns vary. The heart-shaped face and pointed ears are constant. They are short. Their dress is always the castoffs of a century ago, worn in the not-quite-right way of a cannibal in an opera hat. But who ever heard of a black leprechaun?

There it lay for twenty years, refusing to go away. Finally I went away.

"I can sympathize with your problems," he said. "America is a melting pot but even with the best of good intentions there are some things that just do not mix. Even in this small country we have a racial problem."

"Oh?" I had heard rumors; but, looking over the summer skyline of Stockholm, even Vietnam seemed far away. "Our black draft dodgers are not well received?"

The Swede was surprised and slightly indignant. "We have the greatest sympathy for them." There was a moment of silence. "You do not speak

Swedish?"

"No Scandinavian language," I admitted.

"In Swedish *lapp* means 'stupid'."

"But you get along with the Finns."

"Ah, you know something of languages?"

"Only that related languages are spoken in places as far apart as Lapland, Hungary, Finland, and Mongolia."

"What do you know of Lapps — Sami," he corrected himself.

"They herd reindeer and live rather like Eskimo."

"They *do not* herd reindeer," the Swede said. "Sami live along the migration paths of the same beast you Americans know as the wild caribou. Like the wolves, they follow its migration." He shrugged. "Occasionally they catch and tame one — train it to pack or pull a sled. But they are not herders. The Lapps — *Sami*! I cannot break the habits of a lifetime — are hunters and gatherers."

Three weeks later I knew the Stockholmer was right. The Sami lived — rather well, it seemed to me — in skin tents. They kept ferocious, mostly wolf dogs who discouraged tourists from poking around their encampments. They built twenty-foot long replicas of viking ships and bolted on extended-shaft outboards to go screaming upriver faster than my van could parallel them on the road from Luleå to Kiruna.

They dressed in bright red jacket and trousers, not mixing with the foot-and-a-half taller Scandinavians except to buy petrol or a new outboard. It was only when I looked at those blondish, blue-eyed little heart-shaped faces that I finally knew what happened after the Celts crowded them out of Ireland.

The leprechauns are alive and well in Lapland.



*G. C. Edmondson's full name is as Hispanically complex as Lester del Rey's. His SF writing career spans some 30 years; the novel The Ship That Sailed the Time Stream (1965) is noteworthy. He travels — now voluntarily, and to interesting places; work formerly took him to many spots not kindly remembered.*

## LESSON PLAN

Across the blackboard of galactic space

Chalks the message Reason can't erase:

"There are no fantasies that cannot one day be!"

(Epigram-graffiti from Eternity.)

— Steve Eng

## SEASONAL SPECIAL

by J.O. Jeppson

art: Jack Gaughan



*Janet Jeppson published her first story (a mystery) in 1966. Since then she's authored two SF novels: *The Second Experiment* and *The Last Immortal*. We present here another of her entertaining stories as told to the now-famous fictional group — the Pshrinks Anonymous.*

*J.O. Jeppson is also a doctor who claims to be allergic to everything but distilled water and Isaac Asimov. The latter, she married.*

*Pertaining to allergies, Janet writes that she is now in the clutches of her second allergist. We wish her a less ragweedly horrendous next fall.*

In the middle of September, even in the sub-basement dining room of the Psychoanalytic Alliance, the hayfever season is obvious, thanks to a resonantly sneezing chorus of Pshrinks.

"One of these years I'm going to spend late summer and fall in Europe. Or California. Or Mars. Anyplace where ragweed doesn't grow." From the large box she was clutching on her lap, the Interpersonal plucked another tissue and sneezed into it.

Totally unwilted by an upper respiratory problem, the waxed tips of the Oldest Member's silver moustache were as jaunty as ever.

"I," he announced smugly, "am immune to hay fever, as anyone well-analyzed should be. I am ashamed that so many of the Pshrinks Anonymous are susceptible to trite and socially demeaning diseases with strong psychogenic overlay."

The Interpersonal moaned softly and poked gloomily at the Free Floating Fish lying before her.

One of the Oldest Member's much younger Freudian colleagues blew his nose in a trumpet-like bravura and said, "I'm sorry to disagree with my esteemed colleague, but an allergy is an allergy. One is genetically susceptible or not, as the case may be. . . ."

"Hah!" said the Oldest Member. "Whatever my genetic heritage is, I am confident that my defenses are non-neurotic."

"I suspect," said the other Freudian, his voice rising, "that you may have forgotten — if it was known at the time you were in medical school — that it's the body's *defense* against ragweed that causes hay fever. Allergic people have too-adequate defenses. . . ."

"Too neurotic," said the Oldest Member, determinedly sawing away at the overdone Claustrophobic Corn Cake. "I feel secure in my opinion — which some of you may have heard me state — that mine was the only medical school worth going to, at the right time."

Other Pshrinks began to join the argument, and as the decibels rose, the Interpersonal shouted, "Wait! I know you all love to argue, but why don't you listen instead to an interesting case I saw recently. It involves allergy."

"Yours?" asked the Oldest Member.

"I suppose it does. Yes, I think my hay fever is quite responsible for the outcome."

"That I would like to hear," said the O.M.

"Spare us!" came in a loud chorus from other Pshrinks, while the various sneezers went into action, presumably due to the emotional provocation.

"Try not to break up my narrative flow with the usual hostile remarks," said the Interpersonal.

"The mucosal flow is more likely to dry up if you go home and take a decongestant," said one of the Eclectics.

"Decongestants are bad for me," said the Interpersonal, "but I am certain that attempting to tell a story under critical duress will rev up my autonomic nervous system and stimulate my adrenals so that the increase in adrenalin will enable me to breathe properly for a while."

"Let's take a vote on going home," said a sneezer.

"You wouldn't want to deprive a girl of the chance to stop sneezing for a few minutes," said the Interpersonal. "I will proceed:"

I will call this patient Uni [said the Interpersonal], which is not, of course, his name. According to the referring doctor, his wife's analyst, Uni was a ruggedly handsome, middle-aged man who retired early from an executive position after a car accident which fractured his skull. Uni was apparently somewhat odd before the accident, and more so afterward. With inherited money and an ample pension, Uni lived in a large house in a distant suburb, surrounded by trees, flowers, and weeds, all disgustingly allergenic except that Uni was not allergic, unlike some of us who have to spend the season cooped up in airconditioned offices with ionizing filter machines going full blast . . . where was I?

["Narcissistically preoccupied with your ailment," said the O.M.]

Thank you. That's part of the story. I was indeed preoccupied because on the day that I saw Uni for a consultation, the pollen count was out of sight, the wind was blowing it over from Jersey, and the humidity was too low to make the damn grains sink. I had early given up and taken what a friend had sworn was an antihistamine without noticeable side effects.

Not only was I experiencing the full force of the main side effect, paralytic somnolence, but I was getting no relief from the hay-fever symptoms.

"I'm not going to come here again," Uni announced as he sat down, "because this won't help. I'm only coming *here* so no one at home will find out I'm seeing an analyst, and besides, I like to come to the planetarium occasionally. My wife's idiotic analyst thinks we're on the brink of divorce. Or maybe he thinks I'm crazy. Maybe my wife does."

"Do you?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay," I said, going on to ask basic questions about his past and present which he answered readily, while I snuffled gently into my Kleenex from time to time and felt as if I were talking underwater.

"Nasty cold you have there," said Uni after I ran down.

"Hay fever."

"Just like my wife, who says it's worse this year because I make her tense. She says if I continue to hide out in my telescope room she'll run off with her allergist, who's even younger than her shrink."

"Hiding out?"

"Not really. I've just got a room with a skylight above the couch so I

can use my telescope. The weather's been so clear lately . . ."

Involuntarily, I grimaced.

"Sorry about that. Rain would take the ragweed pollen out of the air temporarily, although my wife says it increases the mold spores. Not that rain actually makes any difference to me now . . ."

He paused, a look of dismay passing over his face. Patients tend to get that look when they find themselves telling you something they hadn't intended to on the first consultation. I raised my eyebrows.

Uni massaged his chin. "I see that you are wondering, in your fiendishly clever psychoanalytic way, why rain doesn't interfere with my astronomy hobby now."

Fiendishly, I said nothing.

"If you hadn't gotten me onto the subject of allergy I wouldn't have slipped and revealed that fact. And you know that it's a pain for me to come here."

I sneezed.

"I suppose you're telling me that I'm a pain. I suppose I am. It's too bad, since I really love my wife, that I've had to upset her so much, but I couldn't very well tell her the whole truth. I suppose I ought to explain why rain doesn't bother my astronomy hobby any more?"

I nodded.

"You see, I got interested in astronomy after my accident, when I was laid up for a while and couldn't sleep nights. I bought a decent telescope and then I made a bigger one. I looked through them, and looked through them, and . . . well, after a while I was there all the time and my sex life dwindled to nothing and I kept on looking through the telescopes, and I studied and studied . . ."

As his voice died away, his eyes rolled to the ceiling and his lips moved silently.

"You look at the stars?" I asked, wondering if perchance he was actually studying the neighbors.

"Not any more. In those long nights — quite dark out where I am — I concentrated hard on looking at everything in our galaxy, and then I tried to find as many other galaxies as my telescopes would let me — I spent a lot of time on that blur that's M31, when I could see it, and then I thought, and thought — beyond . . ." He died out.

"Beyond?" I asked, wondering in my antihistamine stupor which of us was going crazy.

He seemed to snap out of his. "My wife thinks I study but I go to the room — to meditate." He blushed and looked guilty.

Several minutes passed, while I attended to my leaking nose.

"I can see that you doubt my veracity," he said. "You took three tissues since my last statement, and that must have significance."

I couldn't think of anything to say, and was not sure I'd be able to say it

if I had. I remembered that antihistamines sometimes had the effect of virtually depriving me of speech . . .

[“Have one,” said a Pshrink, holding out a pillbox.]

. . . and I felt terribly guilty myself about taking one on a working day. I threw my used wad of tissue into the wastebasket and took a fresh one, possibly two. I was careful not to take three.

“Yes, yes,” he said testily, “I get the point. I should throw out my theory, just as my science-fiction-reading son said I should, but what do science-fiction people know? They aren’t *living* it the way I am, and I can tell you that living it is much more difficult, exhausting, full of responsibility, yet glorious, glorious . . .”

He went on like this for some time while my eyes glazed over and eventually the inevitable happened. I sneezed again.

“Good. Excellent,” said Uni. “You are reminding me that reality — and my wife’s analyst thinks my contact with it is dim — is ever present, even in my theory, which is as much a part of the universe as your sneeze is. Thank you for appreciating me.”

At this point, in despair, I managed to bring my voice up to a slow croak. “What theory?”

“Haven’t I told you? Well, you know I’m not yet a professional astronomer, able to get people to listen to billions and billions of my words; but maybe people, even you, won’t want to listen, because death isn’t easy to face.”

Wondering if he’d brought a lethal weapon, I asked, “Whose?”

“The Universe, of course. What in hell do you think I’ve been talking about?”

“Um . . .”

“You mystics and your Om! Don’t try to tie it in with steady-state and tell me the Universe won’t die. Astronomers say they don’t know for sure, but I know. There’s enough total mass in the Universe for it to stop expanding and eventually collapse — and die.” He began to cry. “In agony, perhaps.”

“But . . .”

“Now don’t start telling me that we’ll be long gone by then and won’t suffer, because I don’t have a petty human perspective. I’ve talked to the Universe and I know the truth.”

There was a long pause while I digested this, my adrenalin shooting up so that I did not sneeze, snuffle, or fog out.

The patient leaned forward. “The Universe is alive, conscious, self-aware, and knows it’s going to die!”

I took a chance and said, “*You* are alive, conscious, self-aware, and know that some day you will die. It’s called the human condition.”

“Damnation! I am insane! I have conversations with the Universe — don’t reduce that to simple mumbling to myself about myself.”



"Perhaps it's the same thing. Aren't you part of the Universe? Perhaps that's how it knows. . . ."

Uni gasped. "You understand! Now you know the truth! I am the reason the Universe has to die!"

I was lapsing into semi-coma and none of this was making sense. "You? How can your mass make the difference between continuous expansion or eventual collapse?"

"The problem is not my weight but my mind. My consciousness. Mine and yours. Don't you see that life itself, with its logical extension, intelligent life, is what causes the fatal consciousness of the Universe? In those long still nights sitting beside my telescopes, I have tuned into the Universe and I know that it started as *purity*."

"As in no sin?"

"As in no self-awareness, no evolution, no death. That kind of purity is ruined by life."

"Well . . ."

"You're right. The Universe experiences a well of loneliness as a result of becoming alive. It was all a mistake having a Big Bang, then galaxies and complex molecules and life."

I sneezed. Then I decided not to argue with him or try to get the session back on a more analytic footing, which, thanks to hay fever, I had never quite achieved anyhow.

"Ah, you disagree," said Uni. "A sneeze is inevitable, so why not life? Clever of you. It makes me think. I have been so busy trying to soothe the Universe, showing it that I, its child, understand and share mortality." He wiped away a tear. "My thoughts are that each time one of us intelligent offspring of the Universe dies, the Universe is freshly reminded that it too will die some day. I'm afraid! It must hate us!"

"Ask it."

"Are you kidding? You probably think I'm hallucinating. I'm supposed to ask my hallucination if it's mad at me?"

"Might as well."

He sat back, closed his eyes, and his lips twitched for a while.

"That's odd," he said finally. "The Universe not only isn't angry, it laughed at me!"

"That upsets you?"

"It was a *raunchy* laugh! Maybe it likes being mortal since the invention of sex goes along with it. Oh — my wife will be pleased. I think I've just lost my inhibition."

He looked speculatively at me and I was grateful for the disaster that hay fever inflicts on one's appearance.

"But what caused the Universe to evolve sex — and us?" said Uni. "Don't tell me to ask it because I know it won't tell."

"What do *you* think," I asked in approved Pshrinkese for once, resist-

ing the urge to reach into my sinuses and scratch away the itchiness.

Uni stared at his shoes. "I don't know," he said with the intense anxiety of someone who always has to know.

I sneezed.

"Thank you! You're right on the mark. I'm beginning to understand. I should have thought of it before, because thanks to my wife's allergies, I know about antigen-antibody reactions. An antigen is a foreign substance that produces antibodies in the body. An antibody is part of the body's immune response, but in allergies they work overtime, and that's what happened to the Universe."

"It is?"

"You needn't be analytically provocative. I know you understand from your own intimate personal experience that it's a matter of being raped."

"What!"

"The Universe. Being raped. By an antigen, of course."

"*What* antigen!"

"Probably the dark invader."

He was not laughing, and I promptly sneezed for the umpteenth time. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I may have muttered "Oh, God" as an involuntary comment on the day's pernicious pollen count.

"It could have been a god," said Uni, his face relaxing somewhat. "I remember that the pagan gods were always raping hither and yon. Well, the basic unsullied purity of the Universe got raped by the invader . . ." He paused and frowned.

I said nothing because my throat had clogged up and I was too stunned by Uni's instantaneous leaps into the unconscious — whose, I wasn't sure.

"No, I can't carry your suggestion to the biblically appropriate conclusion," said Uni, in severe lecturing tones. "I don't like the notion that the invading antigen-god was like the serpent entering the garden of purity to rape. Perhaps the invading god simply wanted to experiment and inadvertently caused the anaphylactic response."

I may have choked at that point.

"Yes, I realize that I am verging on genius," said Uni. "The explosive allergic reaction of anaphylaxis was the Big Bang, after which the Universe settled down to the chronic allergic defense of developing antibodies, et cetera."

"Et . . ."

"That's it. They ate each other — matter, I mean. Evolution. Then the ultimate defense, intelligent life, and the worst allergic reaction — consciousness!"

I found my voice. "Are you saying that consciousness is the hay fever of the Universe?"

"Isn't that what you've been helping me to see? Now, are you going to

help me find out whether or not the invader *intended* this? Was the experiment deliberate? Look how much trouble it's caused!"

While thinking of something to say, I felt a drip coming on and grabbed the tissue box. One Kleenex went to my nose, but several mysteriously flew to the carpet in assorted shapes.

"That's it!" yelled Uni. "The invading antigen wasn't an anthropomorphic god! It wasn't intending anything. It was merely a *pattern* transferred from one universe to the next, and it's up to us to see what we can do with it."

He sat back, smiling. "Well, well. Thanks to your brilliance I believe I have arrived at the obvious answer, and I think I won't have to talk to the Universe any more. I think I'll take my wife to a marriage therapist in our town and *we'll* talk."

I smiled at him and sent silent pity to the next therapist.

Uni went to the door. He stretched and seemed to glow all over. "I feel great. We conscious creatures aren't just giving the Universe the experience of death, but the joy of being alive — even if it's all allergy. Perhaps you allergic people are more alive than others?"

I considered this. I did not swear and tear at my hair. I did not throw anything at him. I sighed. "That's an interesting theory. I'll have to think about it — after the hay-fever season."

"M'dear," said the Oldest Member, "I trust you will refrain from tuning into *cosmic* allergies when the season is over."

"Um," said the Interpersonal. "I recently had skin tests for year-round molds and dust. . . ."

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## IMPROBABLE BESTIARY: The Elf

Way deep in the woods, on a moss-covered shelf  
I saw a man one-tenth the size of myself.  
"Who are you?" I asked, and he said: *"I'm an Elf!  
With long pointed ears and a cap.  
I frolic with moonbeams and sing to the trees,  
I float with the butterflies, dance with the breeze . . ."*  
"Get lost!" I replied. "Could you knock it off, please,  
With that moonbeam-and-butterfly crap?"

*"I breakfast on dewdrops,"* he said, *"and I make  
My lunch out of lilacs and gossamer-cake."*  
"Too bad you don't choke," I said. "Give me a break!  
Or do me favor: go jump in the lake!"  
But the Elf said: *"I ride on a dandelion-puff,  
And I flutter, so lively and quick . . ."*  
"That's enough!" I replied. "Put a lid on that stuff;  
You're so cute that I think I'll be sick!"

The Elf said: *"I know how the daffodils grow,  
And I know why the katydids chirp.  
And the mystical ways of the Pixies and Fays . . ."*  
"Shut your trap!" I explained. "You're a twerp!"

But the Elf only smiled like an innocent child  
As he scrambled about in the thickets,  
And he gathered the notes from the hummingbirds' throats  
And collected the songs of the crickets.  
And I could not ignore all the mystical lore  
And the magical secrets he'd mastered.  
But the Elf looked so cute that I lifted my boot  
And I *stepped* on the wee little bastard.

— F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

# **SOME ARE BORN GREAT**

by: J.A. Lawrence  
art: V. Lakey/Artifact





*Judith Ann Lawrence's mother was a writer, as were her father and her first husband (the SF writer James Blish), all of whom kept telling her that she was inarticulate. Before long she had proven them wrong, selling science fiction, then Regency romances (she is "an unashamed Georgette Heyer fan"), and articles on "everything from soap opera to psychedelics." She is also a painter and an illustrator of children's books. An American, she is now married to a Greek and presently living in Athens.*

The patient sat in his flowing robes, erect and serene in the canvas chair. I thought it best to use the small recorder instead of the notebook when interviewing out of doors. He said, with his calm smile, "Good morning, Dr. Pevsner. Are we to go in on this lovely day, or is that button the microphone?"

I do not lie to patients unless it is absolutely necessary. By the time they arrive here their reality perceptions are already distorted. "It is," I said. "And good morning to you, President Nkwabe."

"Please be seated," he said, gesturing to the other chair. The stripes of his caftan fluttered against the red-and-blue of the canvas.

"Thank you." I relaxed. The lawn stretched away smoothly toward the lake, which glittered in the sun through the mesh of the fence. The warmth was delicious; spring must have bloomed all at once today. A circular bed of crocuses shone like a full moon at our feet.

Nkwabe turned his onyx face toward the light. I thought how welcome it must be to him, marooned in a sanitarium in the cold March of Connecticut. The white winter must have made him feel more alien than ever — unfortunate, in view of his condition.

"You were telling me about your family, President."

"Yes — my wives and children. My people are pleased that I have sons. Africans prefer their chiefs to have stable families — of course, they have frequently been disappointed." He chuckled. "But my wives are very pleasant."

"You have two?"

"Of course. More might have been a nuisance; less would be a worse nuisance. They are good girls, and enjoy their work."

"Go on." He seemed very casual, but of course this is an area where tensions can be deeply suppressed. Once again, I checked myself. That was the rule with the patients that comprised our usual practice —

Americans and Europeans. But Nkwabe's father had been Charles Thompson Baker of Hoboken, New Jersey — I must operate on the basis that he was at least partly American. And of course he had taken his degrees at Columbia and Harvard.

"Were your wives chosen on the basis of love?"

He stared at me. "Have I not told you again and again that I am not subject to personal feelings?"

He certainly had, and it was worrying me deeply. In the past weeks he had shown none of the anticipated signs of tension, no stress, no seizures, no depressions; only a controlled impatience to be released from the clinic and get back to his work. His mission.

"But they care for you."

"Yes." He grinned. "I — trust all the people close to me."

"Tell me about trusting people."

A slight flicker passed over his face. "You know, Doctor, I realize that it is your duty to try to understand my feelings. But you ask the same questions over and over again, and as long as you disbelieve my answers we will go around in circles. It is part of my gift to recognize those who are trustworthy, and that's all I need to tell you. What more do I need?"

"You need to be able to trust it yourself. You need to be sure that this — sixth sense is reliable."

He sighed. "Doctor, I am forty-seven years old. I have been President of Basula since 1985, when it was newly formed. I have been President of United Africa since 1990. I have not been assassinated; nobody has even tried, and I walk among my people without guards. I know when dangers exist and deal with them. I have every practical reason to trust myself and my — instincts — in this matter, and will continue to do so. Speaking purely empirically, Doctor — it works!"

What he had said was a matter of record. I certainly couldn't dispute it. "Do you trust me?"

"Insofar as you mean to help me, yes. As a representative of a dead civilization — well, I am cautious."

"I can't help you get back to work if you don't cooperate, President."

"I am doing my best. You are too concerned with what you are used to regarding as crucial intimate feelings. I have told you, such random emotions as may occur to me are of no importance, even less than, say, your own. I have my purpose. Personal relationships must be integrated with it, or turned aside."

Two women came in view on the lawn, carrying a picnic basket. Mary was an actress newly arrived for treatment for a largely drug-induced breakdown. The other was a visitor. They crossed the fresh grass and passed near us as they sidestepped the crocus bed. Mary nodded a greeting.

"Darling! Who's that gorgeous Afro?"



"Sssh. That, my dear, is Napoleon." The friend giggled. "No, he really is! I mean — or maybe it's Caesar."

"What a waste . . ." the ill-suppressed voices faded.

Nkwabe was smiling. "They think it's a great joke, in the honorable tradition of loony bins. I can't blame them. It's hard to remember, sometimes, what it must be like not to *know*."

"But you don't think you're Napoleon," I said easily.

"My, my, Doctor. Of course I do. And Alexander, Buddha, Mohammed, Shaka . . . we all heard the same call." He paused. "Your Christ said, 'I and my Father are one.' At the time it was regarded with considerable skepticism. Then later — it is possible to understand those words when one has been told directly by God, Allah, N'gai, the Universal Principle, whatever it is, that one is part of it. What can you, with your knowledge of ordinary life and ordinary people, know of Truth beyond the truths? How can I get it across to you? No matter what I say, by your lights I sound mad. And your little lights are about as much use as a candle would be to brighten the garden this morning.

"I must peer into your darkness, and find words from your vocabulary. . . . Oh, *pole!*" He frowned, concentrated in intense effort. "Without the informing spirit, there is so little . . . Look at my record. Africa is united, yet each tribe is a nation. Is that not a miracle? Look at the white minorities' settlement among our cultures, the end of bloodshed, are these not miracles? There is still work to be done among the new villages, when I am free again. Look into my eyes, Doctor, and tell me if you see madness.

*"What signs do you seek, that you do not recognize me?"*

This kind of talk made me more determined than ever to get to the bottom of this case. The man was dangerous — and all that he said of his achievements was true. It was terrible that he had succumbed to this obsession. His ability to lead disparate peoples into integrated action was badly needed, and now. But the symptoms of pathological delusion were loud and clear.

It was a good thing that his second-in-command, Washambe, had spoken the doubt. The United African representatives had been elected to permanent seats on the Security Council; other world leaders were watching Nkwabe's incredible progress with growing apprehension. There was grave concern about the messianic quality of his leadership. A summit conference had been held, and Nkwabe asked to appear. He had bowed, and asked what they wanted of him.

"We are concerned about your mental state, Mr. President."

Nkwabe had been surprised. "My mental state? Do you think I am ill?"

The speaker had swallowed. He had been given a difficult job. "We're not doctors, Mr. President. But all this talk about you being the African

Redeemer — ”

“But I am.”

The German delegate had stood up. “The world has had its fill of madmen in power, President. Especially in Africa.” There had been murmurs of agreement. “Such men are dangerous to all of us.”

Nkwabe thought for a moment. “I see that you are really frightened. I am not mad — but you will want proof. It is hard to work with colleagues who are anxious. . . . Suppose I offer myself to the Martel Clinic, to that impressive diagnostic system that they have; would you accept their word? You Europeans are so comforted by machines.”

It was agreed. Nkwabe had quelled the protests of his followers, saying “This must be done, in order that we may proceed. We will lay the European fears to rest, and I will soon be with you again.”

So he had been admitted to the Clinic on his own recognizance for examination and should have bitterly regretted it. Yet, although he had understood the role of Washambe in what might have been regarded as treachery, he only sighed. “Well, well,” he said. “Washambe was always a little afraid of me, since we were boys. I believed he had been sent to me, and I do not know yet that it is not so.”

He had allowed the man to remain in his Cabinet. “He still needs time. When I return, we shall see. I’ll know what should be done. I would regret having to remove Washambe.”

Even under this provocation, he maintained his calm. He should have been thrown into a mode of rage/despair/vengeance. Nkwabe was unreasonably rational.

I was puzzled. Where were the usual persecution fantasies — why wasn’t he afraid of the COMCAT, the drugs, the probing? He was only bored.

We must heal him. We had to crack this mask of imperturbable superiority, or Nkwabe would be lost. If only he would truly cooperate —

Interviews continued. Throughout, COMCAT recorded electrical patterns from his brain, mapping and storing the information. We administered small electric stimuli to nerve centers, causing him to laugh, weep, sing, scream. I watched these expressive changes flowing over his face.

After these sessions, he grinned at me. “That was fun, in a way,” he said. “Too bad it’s so irrelevant.”

“On the contrary, it is extremely relevant. We have been measuring the rhythms of your brain in various states of stimulation, and testing neurological and physical reflexes.” I showed him the display of COMCAT’s preliminary findings.

“Very pret— impressive,” he said in a comforting voice.

We stimulated his adrenaline flow. He looked startled, sat quite still; then tore himself free of the adhesive and ran out of the lab. At last! A break!

Two orderlies pursued him; I ran panting behind. He rushed past the nurses' post, out into the hall, his robes flapping, and out through the glass doors into the grounds. Those doors should have been locked; I made a hasty mental note to have a word with the warden.

The orderlies trotted after him as he pelted over the lawn. As they drew near, he turned down toward the gate where the guard had emerged from his hut and was preparing to close down the inner shell of foam; but Nkwabe turned again and ran back along the lawn to the far end of the house. It took the orderlies a full ten minutes to catch up with him, and then he walked quietly between them, all three puffing and perspiring.

"That was a dirty trick," he panted reproachfully. "Twenty minutes of high-speed running to get rid of it — and it's not quite used up, either. Better let me run again. I am not interested in artificial anger."

We took him to the athletic field where he did two or three laps and then flung himself down on a bench.

"I — puff — hope you — have a masseur on hand — puff. I'm not really in that good condition any more. Are you — puff — sure that was wise, on a man of my age? . . . Wasn't there possible danger to the heart?" His tone, though breathless, was of mild curiosity.

And he was right, of course. I had never seen a patient control his reactions to such a degree under that particular stimulus. There had been no reason to think it would endanger his health . . . but I should have considered more carefully. To admit this would serve no purpose. One must not undermine the patient's trust.

"Perhaps it was a slightly intense impulse for you, President, but not dangerously so," I replied. "You responded to a very small input."

One does not lie to a patient unless it is absolutely necessary.

I began spending most of my time studying this case. There were hours during the nights that followed upon days of reassessing the growing pile of records when I had the half-waking dream that his pure self-confidence was a rock upon which all known therapy would break . . . and we would fail to relieve him of his illness. There were other moments which woke me with a start of horror, in which I saw myself turning to him for advice.

I was not alone in this impulse. The dining room staff reported that the table where the President sat was becoming the center of attention at mealtimes. Patients competed for seats; there would be a scuffle when the doors were opened. The staff was perplexed, however; no patient seemed to find the scuffling intolerable. The unsuccessful went, calmly, to other places, even those with hair-trigger sensitivities. When he moved through the lounge or the hallways, people gathered and followed him.

My chief nurse, Sue Bateman, said, "It's most peculiar, Doctor. He seemed to have calmed them all down. Old Mr. Angeli hasn't hit anyone

with his cane for weeks, and Mrs. James stole a piece of bread!" Mrs. James had been with us for several months. She had arrived weighing 62 pounds and we'd had little success with her *anorexia nervosa*; she was fed by drip, refusing to even sit in the dining room. A stolen piece of bread was a great victory, unless —

"Did she eat the bread, Sue?"

"She ate half, and gave half to Jonny Bardo," said Sue triumphantly.

"I congratulate you, nurse. You seem to have done wonders."

Sue looked down. "It wasn't the nursing, Doctor. It was — him."

She backed away from my withering stare.

The Medical Advisory Committee sat around the conference table. Every month each individual case came up for review and discussion.

A great deal of the meeting was devoted to President Nkwabe; the case was, of course, of considerable public interest. My handling of the analysis and therapy would reflect not only on the Clinic but on history.

No decision could be made as yet other than to carry on with the analysis. There was still, in spite of the hundreds of pages of charts and transcriptions, insufficient data for certain diagnosis.

Dr. Silver polished his glasses. "Nevertheless, it seems possible that we may have to go to Empathery — not necessarily for treatment, but for a fuller picture." He replaced the heavy frames on his long nose. "We must find out where the lesion is, Doctors. There has to be one, and it must be repaired."

I nodded. "We hope that the completed analysis will reveal the problem. But so far — nothing. Nothing definite."

"Oh, it's perfectly clear that it's classical paranoia, in view of the delusional system," remarked Darvey of the Psychoanalytic Institute.

"There's no real assurance even of this, Doctor," said Mariano of Harvard. "We don't yet have a clear picture of ego strength or frustration tolerance. It might well be a case of paranoid schizophrenia, or schizo-affectivity."

"You have of course checked the dopamine levels?"

"See pages 245 to 260, Doctor," I said. "All the chemical tests have been completed. There are no abnormalities."

"I have read this case history very thoroughly," said Tannenbaum. His well-worn brown tweeds sat fuzzily around his body. Many of Tannenbaum's patients called him "Father Bear." "I am convinced that the circumcision is responsible for the patient's condition. Think of the trauma of this experience for a boy entering puberty! Inevitable trauma!"

There was a subdued moan from Schwartz of the Existential Group. Tannenbaum went on, "Now think for a moment, gentlemen. We all know that circumcision is a castration substitute. And at thirteen! I have hundreds of patients who are still disturbed by this experience in early

infancy — what dire consequences must follow on such a — pardon me, but barbaric rite?”

Dr. Johnson spoke, in his deep voice. “Doctor, the context must be considered. Your patients did not develop in the same sort of cultural matrix.”

“Oh, baloney,” said Tannenbaum. “The Viennese Jews accepted it culturally, and look what Dr. Freud found *there*. A man is a man, wherever he may be.”

“Well, we shall have to hope that the completed analysis will reveal the difficulty,” said Silver. “I believe that this committee is agreed that whatever the case requires must be provided. And no one is better qualified than Dr. Pevsner.”

To my relief, there was complete agreement.

After the meeting adjourned, I went to my office.

Empathathy. Well, I had practiced it for some years, ever since COMCAT’s brain-model capacity had been perfected. My own cephalic paradigm, recorded last a year ago, would have to be updated. . . . We had come a long way since the days of lobotomy. Doctor and patient could both record their mental and emotional patterns in all modes — physical, chemical, electrical, neurological in COMCAT; and with the aid of the computer, one pattern could be superimposed upon the other. Subjectively, it resembled telepathic contact; objectively, it was not unlike a dual-controlled learning vehicle. Lesions in one brain were perceptible to the other, and the doctor could manipulate COMCAT’s outputs to electrophorically alter the faulty pattern. It was foolproof and safe; and each experience had added to COMCAT’s information store. Doctor and machine together had mapped the human brain; and we were now fully aware of the possible lesions, malformations, elisions, and under- and over-developed functions. It was standard diagnostic practice before surgery, and marked the transition of psychiatry from art to science.

I preferred to work to the limits of interpersonal therapy with Nkwabe, as long as possible. He should be aware of the processes of his own treatment, for his own sake. (Never lie to the patient unless it is absolutely necessary.) It would, I felt obscurely, be of use to him in his labors . . . but time was growing short. The clamor in Africa for the return of the savior was increasing daily. This retreat must end soon; Washambe was barely holding ground. Only Nkwabe himself could sustain the decisions waiting for conclusion.

The patient inquired curiously, “Tell me, Doctor, what use is it to you to ask me whether I prefer to play golf or attend a concert on Sunday afternoons?”

“I’m afraid I owe you an apology for that one. Every effort was made to adjust the tests to your background, but that one slipped through from the standard version.”

"It's been puzzling me for days," he admitted. "None of the activities in that test were very appropriate. Even times of day do not have the same meanings for us. What is it you were trying to understand?"

"Those tests were aids to the identification of personality types — how a subject prefers to spend his leisure time tells us what may be important to him."

He raised an eyebrow. "Or what he thinks ought to be important to him?"

"Well. Of course. But even that is revealing."

"I hope you found what you were looking for. And I remove my left sandal before my right, in case you missed that."

For once, it was my turn to smile. "We didn't; it is inherent in the brain patterns recorded by COMCAT." I approached the new topic cautiously. "Have you heard anything about Empatherapy?"

"Of course. I wondered when you would get to it."

"Do you understand how the diagnostic procedure works? You realize that you will be subjecting your brain directly to computer scanning, and that, in effect, you will be sharing your consciousness with me?"

He shrugged, and smiled. "If you have something to fear from this, Doctor, you must call in another who has not."

"I have a great deal of experience with this process, President. I just want to be sure you understand that your mind will be entirely open to me, under my surveillance, and that —"

"That you believe you will have the power to alter whatever you judge to be malfunctioning. Yes, I know that."

"But I also know my own truth. You are a conscientious and responsible person, and you will come to share it with me. You will achieve understanding."

"President, you have said again and again that I don't understand. You're quite correct. I do not and cannot accept that you are a — a Black Messiah. Your work has been amazing, and you are a very important man; but the power you now have must not be in the hands of a mentally ill person. Surely you can see this?"

Nkwabe took my hand. "You will not be my first, but you will be my strongest. You will understand."

I sighed. Always, always, the same blank wall.

In a soft voice, he continued. "When you have acknowledged me, Doctor, and even your wonderful machine has confirmed the truth, all the world will listen. Black men and white will know themselves, different hours of the same clock. Only the man in me grows impatient. It is perhaps well that I must wait for you. Let us proceed with this sharing."

"We will begin tomorrow," I said. His grave nod was overtaken by a bright white grin.

That evening I re-read some of the material on his family background. Patients whose childhood passed in an extended-family situation were rather differently balanced than those from the ordinary American nuclear family; yet his parents had been Americans. Why had they gone to Africa back in the fifties?

"It was my mother who made the decision. My father was unemployed. His union couldn't, or wouldn't, be of any help. He felt that he had no real foothold in America. He had worked hard for his training, and was terribly frustrated — this was before the wave of black activity, of course, before Martin Luther King had led his marches. My father did not want to become bitter."

"How did he decide to go so far, to Africa?"

"My mother's grandmother was *kawai* of her tribe, a very important woman. She never forgot, all through her time of slavery and throughout her long lifetime. She was determined to return some day, and she raised my grandmother and my mother too, to remember their place in the tribe. It was my mother who soaked it all in; she wanted to return. So when my father was moping around, with all his qualifications wasted, she decided it was time. They needed engineers in Africa, if they didn't in New Jersey."

"But they were Americans."

"The root was very strong in my mother. My father soon found his — he was in great demand. They were Africans, most of the time." He gave a little chuckle. "My mother had some small difficulties at first — fish need certain attentions before they reach the stage where she was used to them, in little packages."

"Did they have problems, settling into the community?"

"I told you; my great-grandmother was the *kawai*. There had been a three-generation hole in the village system. They were very happy to have my mother come home. "I grew up with the village, which was slowly becoming a town."

Notes under "Peer-group relationships": Social pattern is based on age-sets, as follows: infancy, to 6 years; to approximately 13-16 years, tribal education (supplemented by schooling during slow agricultural seasons) culminating in puberty rites, i.e. circumcision (q.v. Interview 38); "manhood" period divided into five, ending with grade "senior elder."

The patient had passed through this sequence, was now a senior elder; I noted that this stage offered early "retirement." The patient had explained that this system was flexible and was changing with the new needs of the society . . . and that he personally was not empowered to choose his time of retirement. This would come from the completion of his work.

The group of boys of the same ages, within a five-year span, was

thus always considered to be a unit, with strong group-bonding . . . the patient had, from subsequent notes, always been a leader . . .

"You understand that the first few sessions are without risk," I told him. "It will take several consultations to synchronize our minds. It's not that COMCAT is slow; naturally, the machine can work a great deal faster than the human being. But the therapist needs time to absorb, to adjust to the subject's parameters." I did not dwell on the first rough trials of the process, when the imposition of alien rhythms on the brain sent both doctor and patient into *grand mal* seizures. Those days were past; there was no such danger now.

We settled ourselves on the couches. Dr. Silver had offered to monitor these sessions whenever he could. The helmets came down over our heads, and delicate filaments inserted themselves painlessly through skin and skull.

Throughout the session I would report verbally — a string of specifications . . . automatic frequency analyses, area definitions, nerve loci and conditions, hundreds of numbers and Greek letters . . .

**. . . a calm walk through tall grass which scratches my thighs lightly** Only yesterday my sister and I have been playing at lion and love in this grass. Now I am to become a man and it is time to prepare. There will be no more play with my sister.

My mother wept and my father hid fear. They are yet tainted, though my mother's mother's mother had been *kawai la miji*; tainted by the smell of foreign places. But the *bibi* had lived many years and shared her soul with my mother who remembered and returned and bore me in the village. My father is fearful and works on the Uhuru railway, but my mother is Ujamaa, of the family, of the village . . .

I must sleep alone for five nights before we go to be cleansed. I am walking to the Great Lake one day away in the mountain. It is evening, cool and damp. My cloth is still wet from the last shower. Mosquitoes come in dense clouds over the water, in the pools near the running stream which will in a few weeks be the River. Insects skirt over reeds casting shadows that merge with shadows of other clouds on the still water ahead. My legs are clammy in the sharp breeze, as the sun covers his face. I reach the Lake and the cloud splits apart. The pale grey veil drifts open and reveals scarlet, sunglobe, scarlet as fresh bull's blood, and the Lake is a bloodstone set in golden prongs. The wind stops and for a moment the birds are silent. Shimmering swarms of *wadudu* are like spots before my



eyes; I feel a little dizzy The ruby lake is losing its upper facet, there is a swirling of vermillion, a whirlpool, a vortex **The spirit of the Lake is awake** A single bird, a silhouette, flaps across the west and is stamped on the sun's face The water spins, and spins, and rises into a twisting helix of drops of blood No, it is a thin film, a mist of blood, the blood of my own eyeball . . . there is no Lake, only a hole in the mountain top, and red mist spins in the air pulling all things into itself Trees, rocks, shrubs, insects, all vanish into the mist The sun dims and I too join the vortex, will-less To become a man I will shed much blood

I am in and of the whirling mists, drained of cloud, hovering over nothing everything infinity There is no water air fire earth There is only this nothingness that contains it all For a hundred years or heartbeats the mist remains and I am rock and I am mist, I am jungle and I am mist, I am flamingo and scarlet and indigo, emerald and nyoka the serpent, flower and stone and leopard and blood It is one Life and not-life I? I? What was my little name am all that ever was or ever will be for these are the same which is

**Lying on the shore, being with a fish** Dodging among rocks, naked Weeds slide sensuous along the spikes of my fins as the stripes of shadows change warmcoolwarmcool a clumsy sound + a thundering echo! i flick under cover

"Nkwabe!"

i roll lazily The universe contains all sounds Shining brown oilskin wetskin vibration of soleskin on pebbleskin heart's blood pumping rhythm poom/poom/poom/ over long mmuurrmmuurr of compressing sediment and the undersound of heat in earthheart beating poom / poom / poom /

"Nkwabe! What are you doing? You were supposed to be back today, and I couldn't find you anywhere — then I knew. Come on, Nkwabe!"

Oilskin-woven-fiber-motion It has reached me i see its meaning It is to itself important Wondering, i look Clear is his heartbeat He is very important and his loins are clothed in fear He is cased in pressure, he sees himself pushed and thinks it is from other and not self He does not know we are each other! . . . This small fear eats him now; he will be punished.

"Nkwabe! What's the matter with you?"

\* \* \*

Slowly, sadly I herd awareness inward to clothing, oilskin-wetskin, outward to my eyes. He is looking for Nkwabe. But I am Nkwabe, and I am here.

"Are you sick?" He squats, poking me. The little column of air in his throat vibrates with anxiety.

"No. Washambe, I . . . I . . . am not sick. Late? We must go, for the cleansing." His fear shrinks and friendly concern sings over his discord. His relief is confused. He has need, sudden, overwhelming, to recognize; he gropes toward worship and recoils. He is true. In this fragile skin I am not god nor godlike. But he has seen something

"Come on, let's go back," I say, rising to my feet. I am not a fish. I am a clumsy graceless monkey.

"What about the tools, all your stuff?" I look; the appalling numbers of things it was thought I would need lie strewn and mauled in the brush. There was a leopard; I remember.

"We'd better see if any of it is salvageable," I say ruefully. "I shouldn't have wasted it like this. Another time I will know better." He gives me a sidelong look as we rummage in the heaps and retrieve a pan, a sodden blanket, a knife.

"The Americans won't like this," he says, grinning. My father and my mother; the Americans.

"No." We both burst out laughing, in the comradeship of age. We run down through the foothills, sliding down the slippery rocks and shouting. We stop to eat and Washambe insists on fire. He has a tin of meat with a garish label. For a moment my stomach sickens; do I eat of my own body? Am I so hungry? Yet the source cannot be exhausted. The interlock of give and take has no end. I eat some of this meat; I am hungry. Washambe will not let me out of his sight.

We come to the village in mid-morning. My mother flings herself on me in a paroxysm of released rage and love and terror and then remembers the dignity of her position and releases me. My father says automatically in English "I'll have your black hide for this!" over his uncomplicated relief and the chief is scowling; I should not be here. He is happy to be released from my mother's American-seizure. She is Ujambaa and yet tainted.

Washambe and I race to the compound, to the others, for the cleansing. We will live apart for fourteen weeks, apart from women and their eyes. These weeks fuse us in a lifelong bond.

We learn man-things. We do not wash our bodies. The mwalimu teaches and we learn. If we do not learn we do not eat and are

beaten The eyes of women are not watching It is dark and there is blood on my hands and in my mouth many times

I am ill, shocked, outraged. Am I a primitive savage? These rituals are revolting, abominable! What is manhood that it need be so bloody? Animals die, and I die, chanting

### COMCAT records

*I dream I am again among the young men and there is a dead in front of us. We have sharp knives and slice expertly along the limbs. But someone has already drunk his blood! The mwalimu asks questions of great simplicity and difficulty; I know my standing depends on correct answers. This Mwalimu wears a white coat and instead of shells I am carrying white papers with marks. We the young men must be tested or we will not qualify. We the young men are to be circumcised and take our places in the world.*

My father the American's bones turn to water when he thinks how I become an adult, but he is not afraid of me When I become a white mwalimu his bones turn to steel

At the end of this session I was wringing wet. Nkwabe's mind was a nightmare, teeming with pathological symbols. Although I could detect none of the shadings that usually accompany defective personality — neither signal nor traumatic anxiety had accompanied the sequence — this too was an unwelcome symptom. He had even, apparently, thought he was involved in questionable practices; and totally suppressed his natural fears.

It was small wonder that his colleagues were concerned. This patient's affective reactions were severely disturbed.

But I was disoriented and confused at the end of the session. Normally psychotic minds were familiar territory. This one, with its bizarre cultural matrix, was going to be extremely difficult.

Dr. Silver studied me, after the patient had been dismissed. "Do you think you can handle this?" he asked me. "You didn't project any imagery — figures came out of you like computer tape, but you were shaking. What was the subjective experience?"

I shook my head slowly. "I'll have to tell you later. I can't describe it adequately. It was — disturbing."

"Very foreign," said Silver. "Yes, I thought it might be. I wonder if any of us, no matter how much background research we may undertake, are qualified for this particular case. Maybe we should call in a witch doctor."

"He is a witch doctor," I said weakly. "On his mother's side." Silver

stared. "Never mind; an inherited village position. Matrilinear."

"But whatever he is in Africa, we can't take the responsibility for letting a megalomaniac loose, especially in his office. Remember, Dr. Pevsner, we are all here to back you up. Take all the time you need, and don't hesitate to call on us if you find yourself in difficulties."

"I'm bound to be in some difficulties, at best. But thanks." I remained appalled and discomposed; it would be some time before I could distinguish my own cognitions from the patient's. What was that peculiar scene, following on the inconsistent thought about the "primitive savagery" of his experience? . . . That had been, horrifyingly, familiar to *me* . . . I placed the memory. But I had certainly never thought of the Anatomy final in quite those terms.

And yet . . . I found myself torn between the wish to accept the serenity of that mind — indubitably false, of course — and my certain knowledge that the man was mad.

It was several days before I was ready for the second session, several days filled with study. The traumatic puberty ceremony was, it seems, quite unremarkable throughout Africa, and elsewhere. I thought fleetingly of my son's equivalent. He too had had considerable difficulty in becoming a man. Luckily I had been able to afford the professional help he needed.

"Tell me about what you felt when you came to college in America," I began.

"I'd rather — show you," he said. "There are so many things you take for granted here. I don't think words will convey the meaning."

"Very well." We settled ourselves under the COMCAT helmets. Silver was on ward duty. Sue Bateman was to monitor.

**. . . . It is vacation time from the village school, the new school with the old books** The fields are baked hard The heat is heavy, too heavy to move I am leafing through a tattered copy of **Biology for the Ohio High Schools** that I found in the bazaar under a pile of ebony charms

There are round drawings of microscopic creatures — amoeba, paramecium — outlined in black ink and shaded with dots Nuclei and mitosis, anal spot —? It had taken a long time to deduce from the evasions of the 1936 dictionary that even the amoeba has an asshole I have stared at pond water in a spoon until it dried, trying to see all those animals Hairs and feathers and crystals What magic in the smallness of the cycles

I am lying under the banyan, breathing slow, while hartebeeste pant

in the tiny delusion of shade Grass, golden, hangs above my eyes and there is a tiny worm climbing slowly up the center vein, falling back and climbing and falling back again When he reaches the top, what will he find? Nothing? Everything? But then he will have to climb back down again What a lot of wasted effort

I explain this to the wormlet, who nods, and climbs, and falls back Finally, impatient, I break off the tip of another blade and carefully lift him, waving his little head frantically, to the top of the grass he had been climbing We must help one another, I tell him He waves his head and falls on my arm and pants I feel a little tickle and then he drops off and disappears

It is so hot, hot and still The patch of shade is shrinking; I doze, too lazy to get up No one is working at this hour

Dusk, and a slow wave of less-heat wakes me The hartebeeste are gone I yawn and stretch and start to get up — I must go and help my father But my feet have gone to sleep; they won't hold me I can't even feel them and pitch over on my face I move my feet and rub them and wait for the pins-and-needles There are none My arm seems so heavy It is so hot still I lie back to wait for my heat-sodden body to revive under cold stars My nose is full of dust

I awake again to rain I smell the conquest of dust Rain is thundering on the tin roof A glossy calabash-face hangs over me, feathers drooping from its brow It speaks in its throat and calls to the spirit of the worm It is gone

My mother says, "Charlie? He's awake!"

"Thank God! But — Miriam — how —? I can't believe —"  
The mask looms again, making a noise like beans in a gourd There is chanting, noisy and secret I know it is my mother chanting

My father, plaintive: "Miriam. A witch doctor. Antibiotics, antivenom, nothing helped but — I don't get it. I just don't get it!"

My mother does not break her chant Behind her, her teacher urges with drums I smile and move my feet easily I can explain to my father, if he need it As the wormlet and the drums explained to me

I will learn to smell a witch and to frighten a man to death I will learn

to hold nyoka and make him hold his poison back I will learn to hold the white man and make him hold his poison

The bones of the cattle stick out like sharp mountains They run bleeding from the wounds made by the Masai in his hunger for protein (called by so many names, food and manhood, blood and dignity) and from the bites of flies attracted by the dung plastered over yesterday's wounds and the clusters of maggots in their sides Impala leap in beauty and fall twitching in paralysis from the other lives feeding upon theirs We must have blood, we take what we want and others die Even the earth is sucked dry of blood in this chain of sucking

**I am going to America to learn medicine and law** I climb into a large airplane at Nairobi and wave from the window to my mother and father The large airplane has one hundred and six seats and eight passengers It will arrive in London in the morning and then I must change to an even larger airplane It is all very strange and tiled everywhere and very clean, there are only scattered wrappings from drinks and cigarettes The trip is all corridors and queues, much more of this than flying The world goes away from my feet, from the plane, and we soar over mountain and desert which I cannot see from so high up It is the dawn of creation here chaotic in formlessness all cloud and sun

New York I am dazzled As soon as one steps away from the tile colored lights blaze in one's eyes They drive their cars on brightly lighted roads with bright headlights Advertising signs assault one with blinking colors And it smells of unreal things

Gigantic, monstrous city People overwhelmed by their own constructions crawling at the feet of piles of stone Uncountable windows lit in late afternoon dusk must have people behind them but all I see is square upon square of light, hundreds, thousands, millions of lit windows Hard gritty dust that burns my eyes The lights, terrifying and beautiful and a roar like thousands of prides of lions Cars stream stampeding in all directions, honking and shoving as though seeking water holes in a drought I am battered by the torrents of energy pouring into the thick air

Later I look at shops: the supermarket, a wish-dream, stocks seventy-two different kinds of soap powder Row upon row, shelf upon shelf, boxes of clothes-washing powders with different colors

of cardboard wrapped around them. These are obsessively clean people, I think, until I see that there is only one sort of broom, a neon-bristled thing which could not sweep a straw from a tiled floor. There are enough cans of soup to feed my town for six months in this one store on this one day.

I see good ears of corn in the overflowing garbage pails. Perhaps it has boiled a minute too long for the taste of these energy-crisis ridden, economic-disaster-prone, politically betrayed people . . . It is not surprising that the safari tourists are so strange and fretful about their toilet paper.

Had my father ever been afflicted with this appetite for things? Things to throw away . . . The prices of some African teak bowls would have astonished their carvers. I wonder if these too were temporary, to be discarded into the streets quickly.

In the streets children play among the rejects. Where are their cousins, their brothers' wives, the old women? These children know only their mothers and other children but do not seem to have any real group-bond. There is no one to teach them. Families are scattered and gone, I learn, and it perplexes their parents that the children are alienated.

My father had given me warnings about the filth, about the white man's system, about the black man whose white-church marriage had been ended by his sale away from his family, and whose second roots, and third, and fourth, had been ripped out, about the bitterness of the lost fathers . . .

In Africa I am the son of the American, here I am very African. I go to the University, as large as my country's capital. I think this city is dying, or so they say. It is convulsive, and talks of bankruptcy. This I cannot understand; the lights burn and burn and flash and flash and the streets are jammed with enormous cars, and there are twenty thousand editions of one pair of pants.

Hordes crowd the campus. There are no jobs for the young people so they are funnelled into universities and play at learning. They seem angry and restless and have no bearings and no experience of being still. They are much concerned with relevance and style; such a preponderance of "studies" here — they are obsessed with counting. Points, credits, statistics, surveys. Shelved, excess, they fester among activities instead of action, wallowing in luxurious

comforts and small agonies of deprivation I am a man among children here They do not call me George I am Nkwabe I am exotic To be my friend is a status symbol to these orphans vacillating between unformed ambitions and anomie intolerable

I am sitting on the steps of Low Library thinking these things and enjoying what can be seen of the spring sun How small it is here Books are piled beside me I am replete with music I have been listening to the paradox of Mozart, the dance surrounding a core of tragic despair, the professor mumbled He had never heard the Amen! deeper within I feel African

"Man, you gotta light?"

My musical musing is broken A soul speaks to me from Hell

"No. I am sorry."

"Shit, man." He turns away, face wrenched with fury barely under control He turns back, and spits He says "The whiskered whore begs baksheesh. But the Sultan piles up reward in vomit."

I blink For a moment I regret that I have not carried matches

"You with me?"

"I am with you. But I am not sure what your words are saying."

"I mean, cop it, you know?"

I laugh "That I know."

"Where you from, man?"

"Basula, or Hoboken . . ."

"Huh?"

"My parents came from New Jersey, but I was born in Africa."

"Shit, man." This seems to be a sound of pleasure "I'm goin' to Africa pretty soon."

"What do you expect to find in Africa?"

"No Goddam mothers, not where I'll go. I'll have that ofay paper B.S. and they'll give me a good job — no more of the shit you get here."

"Are you a student here?"

"In a way. They won't let me in really — I dropped outa high school. Too much ofay shit, you know. They won't let you be anybody. But I listen in sometimes here — and there's a hell of a lotta funky seafood around here . . . Man, I gotta find out how to be somebody."

I say, "Sit down."

He flings himself lengthy beside me and says abruptly, "You know how to be somebody. I gotta get to Africa."

Leon will become my friend He will go to Africa and learn to be somebody But now —

"Le's go downtown, man."

"Why?"



"Seafood, man, I wan' it. Tonight."

He is insistent. I give in. We go on the reeking subway to a filthy street which stinks of sour anger and dreary suspicion. There is a huge electric sign showing a yellow waterfall. Lady Ho's Chamber Pot, it says. They sell illegal cigarettes over the counter and play amplified music which vibrates the skull. The rhythms are very old and familiar but the melody is full of bitterness. Leon loves it. We sit at a small table and drink weak beer.

"Hey, look."

"What?" This room is filled with white noise, flashing lights, young people of many sexes with glittering eyes.

"Them." He points to a table across the floor. Three girls sit with a man who looks too old for such a place. His head is rolling around as if unwinding from its attachment to his neck, and on each round he grabs at one of the girls. They seem to be caught between an urgent wish to be away, reluctance to leave their evening early, and some anxiety I cannot read. Leon never moves, but some signal is exchanged and within a few moments the girls are sitting down at our table while their escort drowns off alone.

"This is George. He wants to know how come your teeth so long." This seems to be an acceptable greeting. It evokes an almost-polite reply.

"All the better and so on," says the redhead. "Can we skip all that right now? Okay?"

"Sure. Who's your friend?" Leon nods at the abandoned table.

"That schmuck. Sam's uncle from Milwaukee. He wanted to see what young people do here — we thought we'd shock him. Look at him. Ugh."

"Well, are you going to just leave him here? He's high," says the quiet blonde.

"Can't see why I shouldn't. If my mom thinks I'm going to babysit with her kid brother again, she is outa luck." She shakes the short bright curls and flutters her fur eyelashes at me.

"I'll get us some refreshment," says Leon. "What you-all want, ladies?" He draws his words out long and slow.

The music almost drowns out the answers. We dance angrily as the music insists and Leon charms the third girl into leaving with him. She hasn't spoken in my hearing, but she has a dazzling, predatory smile. Leon grins at me as he openly hands me his wallet before following her to the door.

That leaves me with Sam, her uncle, and the blonde. Over Sam's grumbling protests I pay the bill, lift the snoring uncle from Milwaukee gently and support him against a doorway while the girls hail a

cab I am relieved when the cabbie does not drive off — we are an ill-assorted group — the lolling uncle, the two girls and the darkest of Africa. We deliver redheaded Sam and Uncle to an apartment block in Brooklyn which is even darker to the cabbie, but five dollars soothes him. Sam's mother opens the door and gapes at my black face and forgets to thank me. Sam, embarrassed, flees. Outside, the taxi waits "May I take you home?" I say to Peggy formally.

"Please." We get back into the cab and start a long ride back to upper Manhattan. This driver was earning his night's pay from me alone. There is no need to make conversation with Peggy. All the way back, we sit quietly just being together. It is two o'clock when we reach the brownstone where she lives on 109th Street, not far from the University. The street lights are dim on cool mist. At her door, she speaks shyly.

"You've been really nice. I didn't expect — thank you."

She had not expected to be treated decently by a black pickup from the Chamber Pot. Sam's uncle was to have been her protection. American ideas are very mysterious to me still. I want to say, may we meet again? I really like you, pretty girl. A long second passes, filled with thought. I see myself calling her, and more; we become close; and then —? Do I return to Basula with a blonde American wife? For this girl should be my wife. I know, and she knows.

As I hesitate, she says, "Oh! The lights are still on. My mother must still be up. Will you come in?" She leads me through the door. It is too late now; events will take their course. There is the sound of low voices. Then a short fair woman appears in the hall, tying the belt of her dressing gown.

"Peggy! You're home early. Who's that?"

"Mother, this is George. He's been very kind, he rescued us from Sam's uncle — he was a disaster!"

The woman leans against the door, uncomfortable.

"Well, say goodnight and go to bed."

"I want to introduce George to Daddy."

"Your Dad's out."

"Then who were you talking to?"

"It was — nobody. It was the TV."

"At this hour?" The woman squirms. She is flustered.

I say, "Some other time, Peggy. It really is late." But the pretty girl doesn't hear me; she is staring over the woman's shoulder.

"Who is that?" she says falteringly. I can see her eyes widen, focussed somewhere in the darkness behind the woman. Both are

tense, tense to the breaking point. The air is sick green. I am definitely *de trop*; I start to back out quietly. I do not wish to witness these strangers' quarrels. As I step back into the shadow of the door a ruddy man in an undershirt pushes the woman aside. "Who's that black bastard? I thought you said they'd both be out all night."

The woman groped for his bare arm. "Well, I was sure she said she was staying at the girl's house."

He shakes her off. "I'm splitting. Next thing your old man will walk in."

He disappears and returns buttoning a woolen shirt. Peggy stands in the little dim hall, silent. She turns and walks back to the outer door under the bare bulb of the light. She says "George, please, can you put me up for the rest of the night?"

"Are you sure?" I can sleep on the floor. The landlady will be asleep. "Of course I can, but —"

"Let's get out. Now. Right now." She moves stiffly to the landing. "Please, George. Move." I catch up with her two flights down. We walk very quickly the few streets to my rooming house. There are still a few people on the streets in the misty light.

In my room, she sits quite still, looking somewhere else. I make instant coffee — all my larder contains. Finally, she squeezes out painfully. "I wanted you to meet my father. This is my father." She gropes in her pocketbook and brings out her wallet, and opens it to the glassine envelopes of snapshots, and hands it to me. There is a photograph of a younger Peggy with her mother, who looks peeved with eyes squinted against the sun, and a tall black man.

"That's my father." Her hair is the color of sun on water. "I know. It's odd. I got her coloring instead of his, but I'm as black as you and I don't want anything of hers, ever."

This is going to be even more difficult than I had thought.

We look for an apartment, and I meet her father. He married the fair lady when she was liberal and he was young, and stays because of his daughter. He knows the range of his wife's liberality, has known for many years. But he assures me that Peggy is his, he has gone so far as to have a surreptitious blood check. When I say, "But what does it matter? You have fathered her," — because I am truly puzzled; at home we do not make such a to-do about a child's blood — he says, "You marry her. Marry my girl. She'll be safe with you." "I haven't asked her," I say helplessly, knowing that he is right, and that I cannot.

"You making it with her?" he asks.

"No." This is true We are not hurried

"Funny," he says "I can't believe that, but I believe it. But you ask her to marry you. She will."

That night we share the new bed in the new apartment, surrounded by packed boxes of dishes and clothes We have forgotten to pay the Con Edison deposit, about which I did not know, and there are no lights The window is bright with the street light below Peggy moves in the dim room, and her form is clear against the cloth she is wedging into the sash as a shade The cloth is not thick, and there is still vague light in the room I listen to her feet seeking a path among the boxes

I remember how women are

"Golly, we have a lot to do," she says "I'm beat. Aren't you? Wait, I'll try and find some sheets." I listen to the rustling of paper and the running song of her monologue "No, that's a towel. Ugh, what's this? Yecch. I bet there are roaches in this place."

"Never mind. We can sleep without sheets."

"Got'em. I hope." She trips, and falls across me, smothering me in muslin I find my hands tangled with sheet and warm flesh and my body feels the cool cloth and the heat of Peggy warmcoolwarmcool Oh, I am ready for her

We thrash among the tangle of sheets, no longer cold, and I find endless barriers of cloth No matter how we struggle to be free of cloth we cannot reach each other

And then suddenly the sheets are gone

"And did you marry her?"

"No. We parted."

"Why?"

"It was necessary when I returned home. She understood. I could not have explained her to my people. She was too foreign."

"But she was black."

He looked at me with mild reproof. "She is American. She is foreign."

"What happened to her?"

"She married. I met the man. He is decent and loves her very much. Her father approves of him."

At least, I thought, this sequence had played itself in familiar territory. "Do you have no regrets about this? How do you suppose she felt when you just — left her?"

"She will always love me. But I am not her husband. She needed a

closer, more personal bond than I could offer any longer."

"We're back to that."

"We will come back to it as long as we talk together."

"Don't you have any feeling for this girl at all?"

"Of course I do. But she is safe, healthy, has more chance than most to be happy. She has known love to grow in the middle of sorrow, she has known sacrifice. Every step in my work justifies her, as she sees it. Why do you require a — flimsy copy of a romance? All I could have given her was a life of retreat in the women's villages of my country, hiding her fair skin. She has work of her own to do. She is a woman whose reality matters to her. She is grown up."

"And you — no regrets at all?"

He laughed. "Not I. I learned from her what it is to love a woman, and she learned from me. That is complete. But the work is not. One must pass beyond the personal."

Susan came to my office late that evening, where I was studying again the results of the COMCAT sessions. She tapped at the door.

"Good evening, Susan. What's up?"

"It's about President Nkwabe, Doctor."

I scrambled to my feet. "What is it?" My voice was sharp.

"Nothing's happened to him, Doctor." I sank back. "It's the other patients."

"Come on, Susan, what is the matter?"

"I wasn't sure about this, and I'm still not, but I get a feeling that he's *converting* them. Tonight he went to the lounge, and the whole wing is sitting around him — at his feet. And not one of them is African.

"I don't know what to make of it, Doctor. I thought maybe you ought to know."

This was certainly disturbing. Nkwabe was in no way confined. But —

Light flashed on Susan's glasses. "You know the ward has been so quiet since he came. We were sort of pleased — he's been like an atmospheric tranquilizer."

"But I think he had better be transferred to the Cottage," I said. A pretty term for the small isolation house.

"The thing is," said Susan slowly, "I can't figure out what he's converting them *to*. He doesn't preach, he doesn't say anything. They just gather round."

"Have you noted any specific effects at all?"

"Not really. They're all negative. Take Mr. Stock — he hasn't had an attack since the President arrived."

"He's had remissions before."

"Yes," Susan shrugged. "When do you want to make the transfer, Doctor?"

Nkwabe did not comment on the move. The patients of Ward 15 were vociferous.

"He's helped me, Doctor, I know he has!" "Please, Doctor, don't take him away from us." And Nicky, whose eyes had been focussed in his interior world for three years, pulled imploringly at my coat.

"He's having special treatment," I explained. We braced ourselves for trouble in Ward 15 that evening; extra nurses were placed on call.

There was laughter in the dining room, and the rooms were quiet. There was no trouble.

"You don't suppose he actually is a Messiah?" joked Dr. Silver.

"I don't believe in Messiahs, Doctor," said Susan sternly, behind the gold-rimmed glasses. "Only in our Lord Jesus."

Silver and I exchanged shrugs.

The Committee expressed gratification at the general improvement of the patients' tone in our wing. This was attributed to the improved weather — which had certainly made us all feel better, and to the new dietitian.

The discussion on Nkwabe was brief. "Is the analysis progressing, Dr. Pevsner? What is your tentative diagnosis?"

"I am just beginning to get into some of the formative experiences, gentlemen. I cannot give you anything like a complete evaluation yet. It takes some time to adjust to the alien culture patterns."

Silver said, "The patient got his culture-shock over with when he went to Columbia. The doctor's is coming under COMCAT; it's bound to take time."

"From what I see in your reports," mused Dr. Mariano, "this patient seems to have created a paleological universe — his perceptions and cause-and-effect systems are extremely bizarre."

"They are bizarre," I agreed. "But it's not yet clear whether this is due to a fault of ego maturation or because the atavisms are inherent in his society."

"But look at this nonsense about blood and worms! Next we'll be getting the black sun, Doctor, and you know what that means!"

Silver said, "Gentlemen, a computer tape is far more real to us than a worm. A heart is a mere pump, with valves to be adjusted. I sometimes wonder if it's we who have lost touch with reality."

A shocked murmur greeted this outrage. But since Silver and I were senior staff, protest was muffled.

"However," continued Silver, "the basic problem, as to this patient's world-view and his place in it, is still with us. Dr. Pevsner is working extremely hard to separate acculturation effects from the psychotic break. Please be patient."

The committee turned to other matters.

**... I am standing on Kilimanjaro at 10,000 feet and looking out over the rich abundance of my land** Clouds lie flat against the horizon filled with the rain that will break over Ethiopia and be gone when the air reaches inland to the Sudan I look north to Kenya, Somalia, the dry Bedouin country; West to Uganda, the Zaire jungle, Nigeria, the sea; East to Malagasy, India, China... and south to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and the running sore of South Africa These countries are not real; the real countries are Hausa and Nuer, Kikuyu and Noruba The black continent writhes under the lines cut in her body by European flag-planters Once the great Sahara was a fruit orchard The veldt has been forest and the forest jungle What have we done?

Time is, and we are dusty tracings of ourselves Time was, and I see my land changing Kilimanjaro sinks down, and water rushes in to the inland sea The children of the land slay one another, spewing blood through a ten-million-year-long rape Men creep through the jungle, strange men with squat heads and sharp teeth, with snares and nets, and later stride through the forest whistling They dance the dance of blood in the grass that grows where vine and forest have both lost the war for space and air Billions of hooves trample, trample, trample, grass and blood into the wearying soil The men change

My hand is black as iron I see my face in a pool by the sea; pop eyes stare back under a thatch of hairs and as I spit a prayer, thin lips purse over protruding teeth The first of men with a swollen belly

I fall on the earth and crumble it in my hands The earth is my mother and the mother of my children If a man scatters his seed on dead sand, from whence will issue his children? If he cuts down his wives and beats his daughters into the rock, there will be none to tend him, nor his sons, nor his cattle, nor his peace

Our children spill from this groin of the world growing pale and tense as they run to cold places They look back, and fearfully explain that they are kings, fearful of their fathers and raping their mothers in fear We have forgotten to teach them to give back what is taken We have forgotten this ourselves over the years Our children know we have failed them, and hate us

I must tell my people; does the father teach his children to burn the house? This must be our burden, for our children play with fire and

eat fear

I have seen these things because I am Africa

The affective tone of this last session was stronger than any of the previous experiences. I duly noted this in the records, although COM-CAT had already recorded acceleration of heartbeat and increased blood pressure. There was no overtone of anxiety or fear, however. I could detect none of the avoidance patterns usually associated with experiences of manic exaltation . . .

Nkwabe grinned at me. "That machine works both ways, doesn't it? I'm getting some of your images, Doctor. That cross keeps shadowing your thoughts. Stop worrying — I'm not Jesus. The patterns are different. You must open yourself to Africa, remember heat and hunger and pain and the clear light. The light, my dear Doctor, the light . . ."

He was right about the cross symbol; it had flashed through my lower conscious levels once or twice. I supposed it was an inevitable association with Messianic delusion.

"I believe I understand what you are saying, President. A correct analysis will require that I — let go. Your mind is unique in my experience."

"What an odd thing to say. Aren't all minds unique?"

"Yes, of course. But there are common assumptions, common bases — and common catastrophes in most of the minds I have known."

"You can't find the pathology, and you won't," he said. "You might practice a little meditation. Learn to clear your mind." He saw me stiffen, and laughed. "All right, *Doctor*." He swept out into the corridor where a group of patients from Ward 15 were pushing against the attendant to get to him. He nodded; the patients dropped to their knees.

The back hairs on my neck prickled. It was a good thing he'd moved to the Cottage. I began to wonder if I had a tiger by the tail.

Dr. Silver wanted me to stop the sessions. "You are becoming completely preoccupied with this case, Doctor. That isn't going to help you or the patient. I think you should let someone else —"

"How?" I said. "I have only just begun to pick up some of his data-interpretations. Another doctor would have to start from the beginning."

"Dr. Johnson feels that he could achieve rapport quickly."

"You can tell Dr. Johnson that I am surprised to know he's such a racist," I snapped. "He may be black, but he's no more African than I am. It's not the same. Ask Nkwabe."

"You're showing defensiveness," said Silver heavily. "That's not a good sign. This is a very serious responsibility —"

I simply stared at him. He backed down, as I knew he would, but with



one last mumble. "Er. Tannenbaum —"

I chuckled. "— is, as ever, totally convinced that I'll never comprehend the full significance of the castration complex. He'll never share *my* subjective experience of menopause, either, but most of his patients are women!"

Silver shook his head, smiling ruefully. "Dear me. This case is getting to us all — racism, sexism, what next? Well, Doctor, if you feel quite secure, you have no doubts —"

"None."

"You haven't identified any synaptic ellipsis, nothing at all definite?"

"Not yet. I will."

"Ah. Yes. I'm sure you will. Remember we are all ready to step in if —"

"Thank you." I wondered briefly just what sort of assistance they had in mind. Were we all to sit in on Nkwabe's head — rather beyond the present capacity of COMCAT — and discuss it? I laughed out loud as I pictured the tubby Tannenbaum struggling to fit primal scene and Oedipal tensions into his experience as he plastered dung on his head for beauty.

"I understand that you went all over Africa alone and on foot."

The patient nodded. "I had to get to know my people. They needed hope."

"How long did it take you?"

"I started at Lake Victoria in the spring of 1980, and returned to the starting place in the autumn of 1983."

"That's a long walk."

"It was — not so long. May we share it?"

We adjusted the helmets. Dr. Silver hovered anxiously. He seemed more worried about me than about the patient.

"Are you sure you want another session so soon, Doctor?" he whispered.

"Yes. I've begun to get the rhythm of it now."

Dr. Silver set the COMCAT.

**. . . . I must go, and carry nothing** My village makes me a journey-feast, and I depart while the dancing continues Drums bid me farewell and I take my first steps on the long road

I will ascend into the Mountains of the Moon where the weeds grow three times the height of a man and the earthworm is as long as his arm Where the rain falls sideways and the snowy peaks are hidden in cold mist The African light is hidden here, even the rocks wear strange flowers Groundsels loom twisted and greasy with dead leaves, outgrown by the hand of green exploding brightly from their heads high above me Here the rains are born out of the cold between the center and the east

The drums still sound in my ears unrecognizable  
indistinguishable  
through the heavy mist  
Sweat is pouring down my body and a flute or a ndege wimbo  
sings of war sorrow bulldrum  
sang with brothers of the dead  
My breast sheds blood into the sweat  
feet move with heartbeat and  
Thunder on bull drum  
Who thunders with the beat of rock on rock  
against the rain water  
Rock rhythm water rhythm I am not Nkwabe am not a doctor am rock  
and rockbeat heart and hartebeeste water  
And divine  
Ngai seizes my bones on rockhard fists and shatters the rocks  
Westward the fire roars from the mountains  
Mungu-Ngai-god smells of sweat and blood  
My eyes are torn out, and my eldest daughter tumbles in the dust  
with  
a boy and a lion  
The word of god was made flesh and came to dwell with men, and  
the flesh  
Was Masai Ganda Zulu Mongo Fulani Songe Banda  
My heart yearns to the daughters  
The word is made flesh, the word the white child will not hear  
In the beginning was a word, a rock, a heartbeat  
Laughter rolls from my mouth into the rushing river  
The word is white; the word is a symbol of the name; and the word  
is dying with the white man as the Name burns  
The sky closes the cloud and there is no earth  
Trees animals dust water forgotten or not yet born  
A shape of blackness writhes, writhing and burning out in  
A shower of non-sparks — seeds?  
The white sun dies in the West AND THE BLACK SUN RISES  
Fear of darkness against which no fire no house no electricity no  
power to disperse  
Night burns, black and bright in the eyes of leopard  
The sky breaks open and cascades to featureless earth and  
sprouts into  
Mountain cliff rock diamond snow coal  
Green erupts and trees

Join heaven to earth

I am here

My land

My love

My mother

My brothers

I am your soul

I AM YOUR SOUL

**Flies swarm on the cattle as I come down among the Karamojan people and speak with them** The cattle stagger and die, lying in the dust While I am speaking rain clouds darken the sky and the dry earth eats The people dance and the cattle struggle to their feet out of the conquered dust



**A Maji girl falls at my feet** Her skin is flamed with sores and she is blind She wails and grovels People, apart call, "Bewitched! She is evil, outcast for her mother's sins!" She turns her broken

face toward me, and sees me, and smiles The tribesmen gasp as she kneels at my feet with clear eyes and clean skin  
"Her mother's sins are not hers," I say I speak to them, and they hear

**I walk the trail from the Khor Shelengo and turn a curve on the mountain-side** I am among men elegantly powdered with white ash, with memory Women follow bearing calabashes brimming with fresh beer, their bodies cicatriced in patterns of beauty "It is sanda, stranger. You come in good time." Crowds are gathering for the harvest festival After the wrestling I will speak to them of new hope, and the dance would pound a story of rebirth More and more men and women join us on the road, jewels bedded in lips and noses, only a few draped in the ugliness of European Tropical Sportswear Shaven heads gleam with white powder; greyed men groan and sway, celebrating skill and strength Feathered bands on the wrestlers' ankles quiver with the rhythms of the duel

There are grunts and cries from the crowd as one and then the other gains a hold The warden holds them back with a wooden paddle; he has no need of tear gas

The harvest has been rich; there is millet in the storehouses and plenty of light beer But there is a sorrow, too; slowly their sons are going away, to return from the cities with strange objects and poisoned thoughts, and the headman's son has called him "backward" I tell them the story of the Lion, to pass to the sons in warning

Long ago, before there were stone knives, Lion thought he had discovered the way to live, without having to plan, to stalk, to tire himself with hunting. "I will guard the trail to the water hole," he said, "And all who pass must pay a toll!" He lay down beside the path.

Zebra trotted toward the water. "You may not pass until you have given me food," said Lion. "Look at you, you are fat and rich."

"I haven't any food with me," said Zebra, startled.

"Then you will be food for me yourself," said Lion. This was right, for Zebra is Lion's food. But this Lion wanted all good things to come to him.

"No," cried Zebra, frightened. "I will bring you food, so that I may reach the water."

"This is a very good thing," said Lion, and sat down to wait.

Soon Zebra returned loaded with a bulging sack.

"Here is food, lion," he said. Lion nodded graciously, and, licking his chops, opened the sack, while Zebra scampered to the water hole where his herd was waiting.

The bag contained nothing but grass. Lion ate the grass, and growled. He felt strange and hungry. "He has fooled me!" he roared. "This is not food for lions! I will not let that happen again."

Pangolin shuffled down the trail, and Lion stopped him with a mighty paw. "Food you must give me, and it must be meat, or you cannot pass here!"

"Very well," sighed pangolin, and offered a tongueful of ants. It was meat, but as Lion tasted the ants doubtfully, pangolin was gone. The ants burned his tongue, and he coughed.

"GGGRRROOOWWWLL," said Lion. "I will not achieve my goal of becoming rich and fat this way. I will eat the next one, whatever he says!" Nyoka came to the water, sliding through the grass. Lion peered at him, and slashed out with his paw. Nyoka's eye glittered, and he gave a little writhe.

Lion was weak from eating wrong food, and moved slowly. Nyoka bit the paw, and passed onto the water, while Lion lay dead on the trail.

"My people, many strange foods are being offered to us; we must be wary and willing to find our own which is right for us. It may be that what we ate yesterday is no longer nourishing, but we must not swallow others' tomorrows carelessly, whether it be called democracy or communism, technology or development. Some of these things will be well for us, and others will not. We must find our own feet and our own path . . ."

We dance the words of hope and our feet move together; our pride is in strength and our children are healthy. These people know how to share both labor and fruit. We will be rich for our sons, who will lose the taste for poison.

Achmed insists that I ride one of his camels, that he and his brothers escort me across the great desert. It is the season of sand and wind storms.

"I am afraid for my people," he says, staring into the fire. His face is gaunt with strong shadows. "The droughts grow worse every year."

A few bones are stewing in a pot. He has unwound his turban; I am not a stranger. I am Africa.

"Thirty of my own tribe, Prophet," he says sadly, "have gone to the camps in despair, and withered. We cannot be farmers; it isn't in us.

to settle in one place. We must move, must be free . . . The foreigner does not understand how we are destroyed by cities." "You will be free, Achmed. God has spoken; there will be work for the wanderers all over the continent. You will be the wardens of the hidden places, where the railways and the roads cannot go, and messengers. But this desert will be fertile again. It is the will of Allah."

He pours more mint tea into my cup "It would mean changes. It is the desert that we know."

"It will mean changes. But you will preserve your freedom to roam, and wherever your people go there will be food and water."

"Rains destroy the oasis towns, Prophet; they are only built of mud."

"With water, all the land will be oasis."

"We will have to come and go on orders," he says unhappily "That is hardly freedom, Prophet."

I burst out laughing "What a ludicrous picture! Really, Achmed, your people know the news from Amenas in Timbuctou within two days — someone is always moving in the right direction. Don't you think your people can cope?"

His eyes blaze "Of course they can! We will pray; perhaps you bring hope, Prophet."

We kneel on small soft carpets for the evening prayer

Later, he says, "You must not try to cross the desert on foot."

"I must, beloved friend."

"We travel west with salt and a few camels. You would be much safer with us."

"Salaam, my friend. I follow Allah's will."

With this Achmed cannot argue, of course I watch him and his brothers set off before dawn, blue robes and white camels, into the rock and sand His wives and children bid me a worried farewell as I set off from the zeriba

It is not lonely in the desert. There are many animals to keep me company Honey-pot ants provide tiny sips of sweet water Bronze shrubs guide me; and there are at every moonphase, travelers crossing who offer me food and water

The desert is richly various I spend several days in a cool cave in a sandstone cliff, great pillars of gold concealing dark spaces

There are strangely beautiful wind sculptures everywhere

The wind is always with me, softly whirling dust or sand along the ground and disappearing, or suddenly blasting so that my clothing catches it and I sail Under the ground I can feel the rock rising and falling and the old slow motion of deep water Sandstorm lashes my legs and body with whips, yet my head is clear above the cloud; I

need only follow the example of my friends and cover mouth and nose for protection against the finer dust  
At every oasis there are new people; each settlement is built of a different sand, a different tone and texture All murmur of the dangers of this season, this desperate time of drought  
I do not know the way in which the north of Africa will be reborn but when the time is right it will be clear  
Indeed, the air grows dryer and dryer; heat lies, a baking ceramic, on the surface The oases are shrinking  
I walk for many days, and meet fewer people crossing The trails are empty Old forts from the days of Tuareg and Berber empires crumble and shimmer brazen in the sun The animals too are fading  
Many die, for the rains have not come  
The sky darkens; cloud! Is this hope for this staggering world?  
Yes, there is rain . . . but it does not reach the ground  
It is gone, sucked away by the dry heat that reaches so far above, a mockery in the upper sky  
I am learning about mirage, the dream of water, the image of desire reflected from the mind or distance that obsesses the eye

Here is a shelter, to which I make my way through the silent blowing sand, in the shadow of a knife-cut dune It is my friend, Achmed, with two bony camels and his brothers, lying parched and lost He greets me with his eyes, he cannot speak; even they who know this desert have lost their way They have no water I drop, prone, on the searing sand, and listen There is water here, everywhere, far below the surface The clouds are gone I am still lying with my face in the sand for a day and a night

My hands are filled with sand, running and trickling between my fingers I raise my head; my neck is very stiff Where my head has lain, there is dampness I rise to my knees and watch, as water boils up out over the sand, trickles, flows, bursts — a torrent of water pours out knocking me sideways I cry out, and splash my friend with this fountain His camel lurches to its splayed feet and makes a remarkable contortion to drink the spraying, gushing water — it has never seen running water like this before

Achmed stirs as I drench his turban and pour a little water into his cracked mouth

"Ilham'dilla," he whispers Praise be to God.

"It is time," I say "This gift is to be cherished. If men waste this water and feed it only to herds, the gift will depart." This is the ancient river, older than the Nile, stored for this hour for a hundred

thousand years

No shrine must be erected here; the shrine must be the flowering desert

The river will flow into the sea, and spread its children everywhere, if we are watchful and cherish it

The water carves its way among the dunes, who quiver with indignation and subside, and we follow it among the rocks whose shapes have been created by the wind to guide the River

**I am climbing sharp rocky cliffs to the Bandiagara people**

High up on the cliff face square mud huts are piled, ancient and quiet, pueblos designed by a long dead race Fields glisten in the rain and I am soaked with sweat and rain

My tongue moves in my mouth and I speak the sacred language

"I am sent to you by Amma." The chief makes a sign with old hands, and I make the stronger sign He squats, and the hogan comes "Amma calls," he says, bewildered. "I have heard His voice."

I also squat The hogan reaches into his bag and brings cowries, stones and metals to throw on the gritty floor

"Wherefore do you this?" I say

He looks up, a pixie in a pointed cap "I must read the signs." He squints at me, to disapprove

I do not know what he sees, but he blinks, and the shells fall unheeded from his hands He opens them upward, empty, and wails, a long ululation that sings of past grief, of ending fear and the casting aside of masks

**I am eating crocodile meat and palm grubs from a wooden bowl**

My scarlet cloak and oranged eyelids are reflected in a broken mirror standing against the mud wall of the King's house I have touched the King's eyes as he lay dying and felt the evil spirit flow into my hands I have cast it forever from the King's house

There is now a long silence The frail grey King stirs, and slowly sits up The Mganga speaks His voice has a sour undertone

"The King lives! May his seed flourish!"

Behind the drawn curtain the King drinks from a gourd of water

Eight of his grown sons bow as the curtain is opened; not even they may observe the King eating or drinking

"The great Mufumu is powerful. Let him find the thief," croaks the King

\* \* \*



The men look at one another, and at the Mganga, whose eyes dart from one to the other, and back to the King

I sigh This wizard will be my rock in this nation but he does not yet believe Blood will have to be shed first The Mganga has lost prestige — the King was all but dead an hour ago

The Creator is far away from these people Their dead live among them, capricious as monkeys Many men are gathered before the house, singing a song of rejoicing-at-recovery-from-illness Now the Mganga calls, "Let the foreign Mganga find the thief!"

I ask, "What has been stolen?"

"The carving of Lubumi, the father's father of the King; and his mizumu rages in the jungle."

This is a very sacred object indeed; not only inviolate because it is the King's, but the spirit of his grandfather is very powerful

The carving would have great value in foreign museums

The Mganga has donned his ritual mask; he intends to catch me out if he can, and wants to be formally prepared

"I will identify the thief." The Mganga hands me a filled bowl

"The poison is ready."

"No. The spirit of Lubumi will tell me." There is a concerted gasp This verges on blasphemy

*(And I, E. Leonard Pevsner, smell the smell of theft on a feathered savage in the depths of the Congo jungle. He reeks of guilt, as if he had eaten garlic.)*

I stop in front of the guilty man, and he trembles slightly but stares at me unwinking The Mganga leaps excitedly The others cover their heads

"Ignorant foreign quack! Impostor! You accuse the King's son!"

The Mganga crouches, and then raises his arms He is holding a long knife

"The King will command your death!" Then he hisses "But I will ask mercy for you." Aloud, he cries "Let Sacrilege be punished as Theft!"

He dodges into the King's house, and reappears immediately My arms are seized and held outstretched in front of me, fingers spread wide

The true thief rolls his eyes and grins The Mganga begins his chant:

"The hands that steal are accursed.

The hands that steal shall know the pain of the six cuts.

Let the souls of our dead fathers be witness,

Let the eyes of our dead mothers be joyful,

Let the spirit of Lubumi eat revenge and be satisfied!"

He stomps rhythmically toward me, in time with the chant, weav-

ing an intricate pattern with the steel blade around my hands and head. The others echo the concluding phrases of his litany:

"The hands of the thief must no longer hold

The tongue of the blasphemer must no longer speak

His evil will go forth and the spirits will hold for him and  
speak for him . . ."

The knife twinkles in the dappled sunlight

*(When my son was accused of robbery it took seven lawyers, a judge, and eight months to reach trial; and cost six thousand dollars. . . .)* He dances the blade high and brings it down sharply toward my outstretched hands. I know his intent — to cut the connective tissue between the small bones between finger-base and wrist: the Six Cuts. Certainly such mutilated hands would not steal again — or work, or carve, or caress, even if the thief survived. Wasteful.

The knife does not strike me. It flies from the Mganga's grip and lands well buried in the hand of the King's son.

The tribesmen fall on their faces, shrieking. My arms are freed. Balumbu, the King's son, stares at the steel quivering in his palm. His eyes bulge.

"Eeeyah!" he screams. "It is the muzumi of Grandfather!" He too falls writhing to the ground.

"Now you're telling the truth," I say. The Mganga has not moved, his arm still halfway toward the place where my hands had been. His mask looks flat and colorless.

"We will go to the King." Who has been watching from the porch of his palace, surrounded by his women. All are prostrate. I wonder which unfortunate lady is the mother of this son. One day she will be able to hold her head high again.

"O King, give this man to me. These hands that have taken must learn to give."

"Why did the knife refuse you?" the King whispers, ashen. Poor man, he is just out of his bed from his long illness.

"I am the soul of Africa, O King, and stronger than any magic. All the spirits of Africa, dead and alive, protect me. Let your people hear me!"

I speak, and later the thief comes with me. He is restless and clever and needs work to do. He will find work.

As I slowly approach the South African border with Balumbu the thief-prince, who now respects me very much, others begin to appear. From behind, from the trees, from the river banks, men with spears and old rifles, long knives and bows, boil out around us.

Tulani, Ibo, Mbere, Masongo, Bushman faces gather round me  
Balumbu is quaking with fear; to him armed men in ambush mean  
torture and death

Achmed says, "We have followed you, Prophet." I look around; the  
Maji girl, the Nuba wrestlers, the Baya chief — a horde of my  
people have gathered to protect me My heart pounds with joy  
— ancient enemy and modern rival, chief and slave, united to  
protect the soul of Africa, and sharing their blankets

A Nusan chief says, "You can't cross the border, Great One. You  
must have their little book. So we came; together we are more  
mighty than little books."

I have called up no army; it has emerged from the soil of our land,  
created itself inexorably Balumbu has gone from my side; perhaps  
he has run away with his fears No, I should not have doubted I see  
him scuttling through the crowd to me

"I have cut the telephone lines, Master," he says, grinning

White men with guns, startlingly pale, are grouping on the other  
side of the wire fence

"That was clever of you, Balumbu," I do not say that the communi-  
cations will have been useless even without this action No soldiers  
will be brought against us — but of course Balumbu cannot know  
this

We move slowly toward the fence The Europeans point their rifles  
"What do you want? Get out of here, you. The law says no pass-  
port, no entry. Get back where you belong." The captain waves his  
gun, menacing

"Here is where we belong. We have business here."

"You move off, you hear me? I'll give you a count of five, then we  
fire!" he roars The white men scowl against the sun, try to hold  
their weapons steady against thousands of black faces Their fear  
is a yellow cloud

We move The fence falls Rifles emit small bleats and become hot  
The Europeans, now to their own minds naked in the hands of  
savages, cower against their hut Without gunpowder they are  
unmanned

There is the sound of a thousand throats growling but no hand is  
laid on these poor souls We move, on, and from the countryside  
black men come, some still with their tools of work in hand, and  
recognize, and fall on their knees

"He has come! He has come! Shaka has returned!" We march  
easily to the common rhythm of innumerable chants . . . a thousand,  
ten thousand, fifty thousand Africans together Europeans trem-

ble and flee; none of their weapons will fire Africans have assembled, cleaned, repaired those weapons, and where African hands have touched the weapons are dead

I have business with their government, seven hundred miles to the south

The dam has burst and the mighty black flood pours across the farmlands, irresistible, inevitable and joyful The European farmers tremble, and believe they are bribing us to spare their lives with food Gratefully we accept these offerings, but they are in no danger This is a procession of awakening; the father does not revenge himself upon his children for their clumsinesses A few men come with me, into the House of Parliament We walk, unmolested, to the chamber where the Afrikaners decree their fears into law As we open the door to come among them, there is a great outcry

"Guards! How did they get in here? Guards!"

"There are no guards, any more," I say "Please be seated, gentlemen. We have come to tell you something." They pour to the exits, struggle with the handles The doors will not open to them They turn, raging, to attack

"Be still, and listen." The clawing hands close on air They cannot touch us Slowly, frightened, they file back to their places They smell of thievery and fear

"You have completed your task of teaching here," I say "We thank you for some of your lessons.

"It is now your learning time, my children. You have expressed yourselves very clearly, that you wish to live apart from us. You and your fathers were born upon this soil, and you feel that you are Africans, yet you will not partake of Africa. Nor can you return to Europe. Your plans for us are not suitable to us, but since you have been so emphatic we will grant you your wish.

"Your new homeland will stretch from Queenstown to Graf Reinet, and south to Port Elizabeth. These lands you may have, to do with as you will."

There is a roar "You can't turn us out of our homes! This means war!"

"Be still, my children. No harm will come to you. We grant you precisely what you have so ardently desired, and we wish you well. You may trade with us or not, as you please. But you will do your own work. Thus perhaps you will learn the meaning of Africa."

Balumbu sidles up to me, and whispers

"You will, in accordance with international law, carry your passports when you wish to leave your country. Visas will be required."

"This is an outrage! The United Nations —"

"The United Nations will hear all about it, when it is time."

My followers join in laughter. We are on the crest of the wave. The hands of some of these people have never touched tools, while we have learned how the tools are made, and used, and repaired.

"Go now to your homes. This government is dissolved; you will have twenty-nine days to arrange your lives. Your houses may be sold through an agency here, if you have not completed a sale before that time. Of course you may take all your portable property with you.

"And do not trouble to try to fight; your arms are cursed and will not fire. Go in peace; there will be no violence."

Now the doors open, and they burst out, stunned. Some try again to leap at my throat, and fall back. The Zulus shake their spears, but no blood is written into this step.

We move out into the city to see consternation spreading, and we are filled with joy and triumph. It has been so close; had my people been compelled to revenge themselves in blood, they would have turned on one another in their passion; but the soul of Africa is turned away from death to life.

A small thin man ineffectively shields a peeled-potato of a wife from our lasciviousness, and a hundred men cannot contain their laughing. Such is the superstition of the European! The couple scuttles away, muttering.

A Xhosa couple mock them in a spontaneous dance, and we are dancing in the streets on tides of joy.

We had heard much later about this strange bloodless coup that had taken place and was completed a month before the outside world heard one word. The New South African (Sotho, Nusani, Nguna) Republics had been welcomed by the international community with some relief, in fact. But nothing had ever been said about Nkwabe.

I thought I knew why — or at least, what he would say. His powers of protection extended against interference by the media "until it was time" . . . but why had the weapons been useless? This was a statistical impossibility. Freak weather conditions? Psychological guilt on the part of the Europeans? Any theory one could think of came to the same conclusion: a miracle.

I paced my floor, up and down, up and down. I had shared Nkwabe's memories, beliefs, opinions. It didn't make sense. He was a megalomaniac, there was no doubt. But reality seemed to be upholding his delusion.

There *was* a new river in the north, and the Sahara was now a 100-square mile museum, a preserved park. It had been explained to no one's satisfaction as a freak earthquake result. There was a new map of Africa;

there *was* a new white state at the southern tip. There had been no border disputes since the readjusting of countries to accommodate peoples instead of foreign 19th-century history. Nkwabe's friend Leon had won the 1986 Nobel prize for his conquest of the ferocious trypanosome — the disease spread by the tsetse fly that had so long hampered animal life all over Africa.

But *divinity*? . . . I thought that the international anxiety about his dangerousness was probably unrealistic; he was a purely African phenomenon. He was extremely unlikely to convert the rest of the world to small-ecology cultures and peace. Africa was certainly better off for his existence.

But was he *sane* . . . he himself was certain that he was a redeemer, a messiah, a savior.

My head was ringing. At one moment I was convinced that his perceptions, as he recalled them, were totally false, that events could not have occurred in just that way. At the next moment, his interpretation seemed the only possible explanation for the facts.

I left my office and moved restlessly down to Ward 15. Mrs. James was not in her usual chair in the lounge, and Nicky was gone from his corner. It was as if I had been away for a year; I did not recognize a single patient.

Dr. Silver looked up from the files he was reading. "Where are Nicky and Mr. Stock, Mr. Angeli, Mary? Has the ward been changed without consulting me?"

"Surfaced, have you?" Silver smiled. "They've gone home."

"Gone home?" I said blankly.

"You'd better have a look at the files. We're all rather surprised." He handed me some folders. "The whole ward was discharged over the past week. There hasn't been a symptom in months, from a single patient. Everybody suddenly seemed to straighten out."

This was incomprehensible. I took the files automatically, and stood, unable to think. I knew, and didn't want to know, how they had been cured. I didn't need to read the folders.

"Are you all right, Doctor? You're looking a little pale."

I opened and shut my mouth several times. "I guess I'm — a little tired."

Silver nodded. "Sit down, I'll fix some coffee. Or would you like a drink?" He opened a drawer in his big desk and produced a bottle of Jack Daniels and poured it into small glasses. "I prescribe a small oral dose of alcohol. I think you could use it. This case has been a terrible strain on you."

"I'm sorry I've left the whole wing to you, Doctor."

He waved this aside. "I've been waiting for a chance to talk to you. How is it going?"

I sank into his patient's chair. "It's been a — learning experience. I

have certainly come to see a great deal about Africa that one doesn't normally read in the papers. . . . Did you know that tribes in the Zaire basin have been practicing crop rotation for hundreds of years, because they have observed that their soil is weak and needs this? But the anthropologists and advisors called it 'shifting hoe culture' and 'primitive,' because jungle savages couldn't know anything."

Silver nodded. "And the Jews ate babies."

"Harry, I don't think he's pathological."

"Do you know what you're saying?"

"Yes."

"And COMCAT?"

"COMCAT — his brain matches its ideal model. In all respects."

"No lesions."

"None. A few connections that had only been hypothesized." The whiskey warmed me.

"We'll have to check and recheck all the material."

"Of course. I have no doubt about what will be found, though. I have never known a mind so — untroubled, so serene and sure, unless the subject was withdrawn or in trance. He's neither."

"And so he is sane after all. In spite of everything. You are quite sure of this?"

"We define the sane man as one who is able to handle reality, don't we? This patient — no; client — has given every evidence of being in touch with reality. Only if we choose to disregard recent history could we say otherwise." I rubbed my forehead.

"You're very tired."

"Yes, I'm tired. But at the same time I am refreshed. All these years of sharing minds with the limited people, Harry, minds warped with fears and sorrows, unexpressed hostility, antique pain. His mind is clean. And good."

Silver sat back and raised his glass. "Cheers. I almost envy you."

"This will be the final session, President."

Nkwabe nodded. "Yes."

"You know where we stand, then?"

"Yes." He smiled warmly. "So do you." As we settled ourselves, he said, "I have enjoyed this unusual sharing with you, Doctor. I hadn't expected this machine to be so effective, to allow for the transference — would you say? — of souls. You are still a little doubtful, but don't worry. It will clear."

By now I should be used to this man reassuring me. I was uncomfortably aware that my own psyche was a great deal less rich and complex than his. He *was* reassuring.

\* \* \*

### **... This is the first heartbeat**

My roots spread out in the soil of my land and shoot forth  
under the shrunken desert and feed the new fruit  
My kingdom lies north and east and south and west of Kilimanjaro  
and men sing as they toil, and rest with dancing  
Foreigners walk here on tiptoe, respecting the miracle  
I hear the spirits of our fathers rejoicing and their  
song cheers my children

Ships swarm on my coasts and collect no slaves  
Coal and oil and gold, teak and copra and coffee

My friend the King's son, the thief Balumbu  
sits in the chair of the Trade Ministry  
protecting us from thievery

My friend Leon dances with his wife among  
the glowing children who will live

We stand together on a mountain in the sun  
Herds of wildebeeste graze below on the plain  
because cattle are no longer the sign of richness  
Our animals are African, giraffe, antelope, hippopotamus  
playing in the blue river

We walk together on the plain  
The beasts ignore us; a rhino passes by, oblivious  
a few feet away  
The earth is bright with growing things

A memory, a white ash  
The grass is gone, the river a baked  
cracklepatterned mud flat  
A few ribbed cattle lie on their sides, panting  
Flies cover the dying and fly to the living  
One lands on my arm and crawls  
On my skin, my black skin, my white skin  
And pushes a needlenose into my flesh  
to gorge itself on my — my! — blood  
Its belly swells and swells, and I  
can see with microscopic eye  
crescents with tails pouring into my vein

\* \* \*



I awake from terminal coma to find rain  
crushing down, a giant drill  
Washing me clean of sleeping sickness and fear

I walk in a field of cut diamond prisms  
Leaving a trail of bloody prints  
Diamonds bury themselves like lizards  
in rock, mud, their facets dimming and fading  
Inside a piece of amber  
An ancient fly stares back at me  
We fly together out of the viscous gold into the air  
And burrow in the long fur of a mammoth

A man crouches, and stares and falls on his face  
The first man

### **This is the second heartbeat**

My daughter would not wear iron He has told us that iron on the  
neck and limbs of women is against the gods, the god, him; and my  
daughters will be with god

But God cut the foul earth away from the sky, and gave us cattle  
from heaven

My son is going to a school and making many writings In the spring  
he must stop this and go to the mangata with the men to learn  
fighting and to eat only meat

But he says we must love the earth, the foul/sweet earth, and  
even the warriors must eat fruit

My son is going to the school and making many writings My father  
and my brother do not make writings and they are great warriors  
But even the laboni says that the boys must go to school

How can this be?

I must go now to milk the cattle My daughter paints her face with  
copying, copies of the writings from my son's kitabu

Aaa-ma, it is very perplexing

My daughter will marry a warrior I also married a warrior

I have thought a secret thought

A warrior without war is not a warrior

He is a child playing

There is no war and there will be no fighting

But they say that a man must be a warrior

Even if all he does is herd cattle

How can my son be a warrior with writings? His father does not

understand this

My daughter will not wear iron on her neck But the laboni says they  
will put iron in her open tooth to make it strong  
It is very perplexing

### **This is the third heartbeat**

I am naked

I stretch out my hands to the sons and the daughters  
and the sun rises to strike between my fingers  
Blood shows red in the dawn

Equality is not identity

We will not massproduce ourselves

but walk slowly with our own feet

My outstretched hands are pale in the morning sun

My roots stretch throughout my land

The soul of Africa is one with her body

But my roots tremble and are uneasy

The strong new grass blows

An eland lifts her head and sniffs and  
spurts away in fear

My hands are outstretched and strong and black

Living things pour from my fingernails

The black sun rises

And

rising

Lights the world

Tembo elephant flower ua mwiba thorn sun jua samaki fish baboon  
nyani ndege bird grass majani mtoto child lion simba mazao harv-  
est crocodile mamba msitu forest mankind mtu tumbili monkey  
mosquito mbu

sifuni

the black sun has risen

The gifts are great

the dangers are great

If the rivers are not cherished they will die back into earth

I remember boned dunes

If the earth is not cherished it will die back into rock

I remember the Chamber Pot

If the fire is not cherished it will eat the forests

I remember the black millet field  
 If the brother is not honoured his spear will drink  
 I remember Lesotho  
 If the burden is not carried it will rot away  
 When the father is dead, who will teach the children  
 My hands are strong  
 I am the soul of Africa

sifuni / praise  
 the black sun has risen  
 the black sun has risen



THE BLACK SUN HAS RISEN  
 sifuni

s i f u n i

ASARA / DESTRUCT

The members of the committee shook the President's hand and wished him a pleasant journey. He was very quiet. Reporters crowded at the gates.

An official limousine was admitted to the grounds. I knew them all

—Leon, Washambe, Balmuba. They embraced the President, thanked us with ill-concealed impatience. Surrounded, he shuffled to the car.

Dr. Silver turned to me. "Well, you ought to be very pleased, Doctor. The world could ill afford to lose such a gift."

I could still feel the desperate grip of Nkwabe's handshake. His face stared at me beseechingly from the car window.

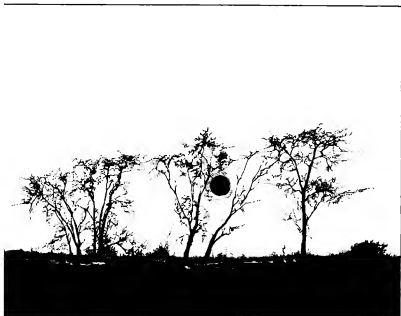
"Well," said Silver, "I'll go and check on that repairman. You were lucky that COMCAT didn't develop that short circuit before the end of your last session."

I nodded absently. My head still ached with an ache that would never again leave me. I needed time to think.

No, the world has not lost the gift. The gods who give such gifts are capricious — Allah, Mungu, Ngai, Machine. Nkwabe's years, which I have shared only in artificial memory, had passed in learning the heart and body of the Africa whose soul he had been born to carry. He goes now to stand before the parliaments of the world, fumbling and empty. The caprice of the gods takes no note of man-made insulation on a circuit.

The world has not lost the gift. But I, Edith Leonard Pevsner, Ph.D., M.D., free, white and sixty-two, stare into my fruitless future as the soul of Africa.

Sifuni.



# THE OBSERVATORY

by George H. Scithers

Recently, we spoke at the 92nd Street YMHA in New York City as part of the Y's lecture series. We spoke on science fiction, of course; more precisely, on "Science Fiction as 20th Century Realism." Our argument, briefly: Since SF is the only literature that concentrates on the effects of change on people, and since change is a — if not *the* — dominant factor in the current century, therefore SF more realistically represents the contemporary scene than "mainstream" writing does.

(The editorial "we" is realistic here: one of us wrote the speech (Darrell Schweitzer), another delivered it (George Scithers), and we both worked out the details beforehand. The audience seemed enthusiastic, the staff of the Y were both efficient and friendly, and we enjoyed ourselves. We are available for similar lectures; write and ask for details.)

There is, however, more to the popularity of science fiction — especially hard science fiction — than its concentration on, change. The British scientist, J. B. S. Haldane put it one way: "Now my suspicion is that the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose." Mark Twain put it another: "Truth is stranger than Fiction, but it

is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't."

Exactly.

When science fiction is based on real science, and especially on the science at the very edge of our expanding sphere of knowledge, it can be strange, and exciting, and wonderful beyond any mere flights of imagination and fancy. This — even more than any need to Instruct the Young in the Sciences — is why science fiction, at its best, is based on the most accurate representation of the Universe available to a hard-working writer. Or, as Grizzly Pete (in reality, Col. William C. Hunter) put it: "The most successful liar is the one who lies the least."

Elsewhere in this issue, you should find a return-postage-paid postcard: a survey of you, our readers. We need to know what you like to read and some personal details as well — first, so that we can aim the magazine better; second, so that we can attract more advertisers to these pages. Quite frankly, we need the money, and it's less painful to sell ads than to raise the cover or subscription price. So — *please* — take a moment to fill out that survey — *especially* if you've never written to us before! We need to know what you like and what you *are* like. ><

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